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THE WIND BETWEEN THE WORLDS

BY

ALICE BROWN

AUTHOR OF

"THE PRISONER," "THE BLACK DROP," "BROMLEY NEIGHBORHOOD," "THE FLYING TEUTON," ETC.

"The wind that blows between the worlds."

—RUDYARD KIPLING.

New York

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THE WIND BETWEEN THE WORLDS

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I

Mrs. Peter Harvey came down at ten o'clock in the morning of this winter day of the Boston of 1918, to the second floor sitting-room which was especially hers, and, early though it was, she found her mother, Madam Brooke, a small woman of something over eighty, there before her. Mrs. Harvey, who also was small, with a plump abundance of delicate flesh, her pink face massaged to the extreme of scientific art unremittingly pursued, her shining white hair waved in a perfection that flouted nature, hurried up to her mother sitting there by the fire, a table with book, glass and handkerchief at her side, and kissed her soft cheek.

"Darling," said she, "what does make you get up so early?"

Madam Brooke owed nothing to massage, beguiling gloss out of a bottle or the best of pink powder. She was, though much given to laces and soft fabrics hung with the faintest garden scent, an old-fashioned old woman, very sweet, from her wholesome habits, but borrowing nothing from the expedients of age not yet accommodated to itself. She was as different from even a suggestion of youth as an exquisitely modeled seed vessel, with gossamer wings to carry it in capricious yet decreed wanderings on strong winds, is from the flower that bloomed to make the seed or that other flower, its child.

She and her daughter were much alike in their delicacy of type, only that Mrs. Harvey had taken on veil after veil of the soft flesh that is so beautifying in its first insidious advent, and her mother had shrunk to slenderest contours. They had the same blue of the eyes, the abundant fine white hair, the sweetness of curved lips. But the few deep lines of the older woman's face made a map where you travelled to keener decisions, more unfailing rigors of judgment than you would look for in her daughter; her nose was more decidedly aquiline and she had the stronger chin. Perhaps the similarity of their outer lives might have moulded them to some identity of likeness, the winters in Boston, the summers abroad or at their sea-coast home; but it had done nothing of the sort. They were ineradicably different, alike in nothing save that they were gentlewomen, generous, self-forgetful, kind, but exercising even these salient qualities in ways so diverse that in Mrs. Harvey they sometimes seemed faults and in her mother deliberate naughtiness. At her daughter's question Madam Brooke looked up, with a quizzical interrogation of her own, but said nothing.

"I do like," said Mrs. Harvey, "to feel you're getting your ten hours, at least. And last night you were late. Susanne told me."

"Susanne's a tattler," said the old lady pleasantly. "Yes, I was late. What was the use of going to bed? I knew you'd keep me awake."

"I?" said Mrs. Harvey, in a perfect surprise. She took a step nearer the fireplace and set her beautifully shod foot on the fender. "Why, I was down here every minute with Miss Bixby."

"I knew you were. That's what kept me awake and Peter in the library waiting till you'd dismissed your spooks and gone to bed."

"Don't!" said her daughter, with a little unaffected shiver of repudiation. "We were trying to get Philip."

"I'm not including Philip, dear boy," said the old lady. "You didn't get him, did you?"

"No," said the mother of the dead aviator, in a low tone. "That is, I wasn't sure."

Her lower lip trembled. It had taken to trembling since the news of Philip's death in France. Her mother, with an inner apprehension of her own, had got into the habit of watching for that trembling. She never could help remembering that her sister Clarissa had these fits of nervous tremor after the death of her husband, and that she never quite got hold of herself again. But she thought it salutary for her daughter to be drawn out of her present habit of action by a robust insistence on the facts of life as they appear in everyday dress.

"Whom did you get?" she inquired brusquely, in her decisive voice piquingly deepened by a contralto note.

Her daughter hesitated.

"Uncle Edgar," she said, "Aunt Clarissa, father—"

"That will do," said the old lady, with a sudden tremulousness of her own, either anger or close kin to it. "Don't you take your father's name in vain nor Sister Clarissa's. I won't have it."

She spoke with authority, as if her daughter were a little girl, and the daughter humbly accepted it. But she did venture, after a minute:

"They say Philip is there with them. They all say the same."

"Then why doesn't Philip speak?"

"He is too tired. He hasn't recovered yet—from his going over."

"I'll tell you why he doesn't speak," said the old lady fiercely. "Because that Miss Bixby of yours never saw

him. She can perfectly well risk people that died twenty years ago. But when she's been with you longer and heard you talk about Philip more and gathered up every word into her neat little brain, why, then Philip'll come, too. She's a minx, that Bixby."

"Mother," said Mrs. Harvey desperately, "I don't care what she is, so long as she can take a pencil and write these wonderful things."

"They're not wonderful," said the old lady stubbornly. "They're a kind of dribbling philosophy that's neither here nor there. You sit down with your Bible, if you want to read good things in good English, and stop paying a girl for turning out this half-baked stuff by the yard. If she's your secretary, let her be your secretary and write your letters and hold her tongue."

Mrs. Harvey was much cast down. She looked like a child who finds itself deprived of a harmless solace likely to hurt no one. And that she said.

"If it's a comfort to me, mother, I don't see what harm it does any one else."

"The whole atmosphere of this house has changed," said her mother vigorously. Hitherto she had been silent, indicating her opinion of Miss Bixby's spiritual secretaryship by merely holding herself aloof. But now, after mature deliberation, she had decided to speak, and perhaps her argumentative cohorts rushed on the more wildly for her sleepless night. "Peter — and you might remember he's your husband — he's got some rights — he keeps himself shut up with his grief over Philip because your way of taking it sets his teeth on edge."

"I never could have believed Peter would take it so quietly."

The admission leaped from Isabel without her will. It was one of the spectres in her own sleepless nights.

"That's it," said the old lady. "You've driven him out of his mind with this spirit writing of yours. No wonder he's as dumb as a fish."

"Oh, no," said Isabel, with a shade of unaccustomed irony tingeing her soft voice. "Peter may be feeling Philip's death, but he isn't out of his mind."

"No," said the old lady, with a different irony, one she frankly adopted and used for what it was worth, "he's not out of his mind. But you're on the road to being. And if you don't hold your horses you'll — what is it Philip himself would say? — you'll go dotty yourself. Lord! there's that girl."

Madam Brooke was exceedingly irritated when she could run the risk of letting her daughter's secretary hear herself called "that girl" with the tone of an imprecation. But if Miss Bixby, entering, did hear, she gave no responsive sign. She came in alert though subdued, the perfect secretary, concentrated purpose and yet decent readiness to take orders and obliterate all initiative of her own. She was a small woman, white-faced, heavy-browed, black-eyed, with a head made unsymmetrically large by the quantity of fine shining black hair she evidently disposed to look as inconsiderable as she might, and that yet showed its weight in every contour. She wore black, neat to the last point of care, and exquisitely kept collar and cuffs. At first it had rather distressed Mrs. Harvey to find she dressed like a maid, because she thought it must indicate some mental repression that gave the girl pain. But when Miss Bixby, with an air of not finding the topic of any consequence, told her it was a matter of economy, she rather liked it. For Mrs. Harvey did, deep down in her kindly heart, love the ritual of things. She found it soothing to have servitors defined, just as she liked chapter headings in her novels. They

told you without trouble where to begin and where to leave off.

This room, perhaps sixteen feet square, had a large mullioned window making a recess, and in the recess was a good sized table, in an austere order of rolls of paper and a pencil tray. This was the corner where she and Miss Bixby sat hour after hour now, putting down communications from the skies by the hand, though not the brain, Mrs. Harvey could swear, of Miss Bixby. It was an ideal corner for work, commanding the room and all who entered and yet, by reason of the recess, secluded, and they had the window light by day and a perfectly placed electric bulb after dark. These were its obvious advantages; but Mrs. Harvey knew she had placed the table just at that point because, from her seat, her eyes looked into the pictured eyes of Philip, her son who had died, from the big framed portrait over Miss Bixby's head. Miss Bixby went on to the table and dallied slightly with the position of paper and pencils. She had left them in order last night, but one of her secretarial virtues was not only inflexible insistence on leaving her tools exactly disposed but the further precaution of running them over as a pianist tries his keys, when she came back to them again.

"No," said Mrs. Harvey, in a rather shaken voice that drew a quick inquiring look from Miss Bixby, instantly withdrawn, "we won't write this morning. I'd like you to go out and do a little shopping. The list is on my dressing-table. I meant to go myself, but I—" She stopped there, turning her back on Miss Bixby, who knew, in her accurate habit of getting at the inner mind of the woman who was her daily bread, that there were tears in her eyes as well as her voice. Madam Brooke knew it, too, and when Miss Bixby had vanished out of

the room, in her noiseless way, she put out a thin lace-veiled old hand and took a fold of her daughter's skirt. She twitched it a little as an unregarded child might have done.

"Made you cry, didn't I?" she said, in her deep-toned voice that showed an emotion of its own far more devastating than tears. "I s'pose I'm an old cat."

Mrs. Harvey patted at her eyes with a little ineffectual handkerchief and smiled.

"I wish," she said, "you didn't think I'm a fool."

"But you are, Isabel," returned her mother conclusively and also with renewed cheerfulness. She had somewhat the feeling of a man over woman's tears. If Isabel wasn't going to cry she could rally her some more. But cry she mustn't; it was mean, unsportsmanlike. "Isabel," she said, "it's pretty serious. You know you didn't have one son only. You had two."

Isabel looked at her with an honest, questioning assertiveness.

"Of course I have two," she said. "Philip 'over there' in spirit life and Brooke on his way home."

"Sometimes it seems to me," said the old lady, feeling her way, "as if you'd got so into the rut of trying to hear from Philip that you've forgotten Brooke."

"Forgotten Brooke?" Her daughter echoed it in amazement. She was too surprised for rebuttal. "How could I forget Brooke?"

"Well," said the old lady, watching her and thinking she was perhaps making some headway into her closed mind, "Brooke's alive. He's an aviator, too. And he's escaped his awful perils and he's coming home. That's a wonderful thing, Isabel. Flying in France and getting out of it alive and coming home."

"Why, of course it is," breathed her daughter, still in

a confusion of surprise. "Don't you suppose I'm thankful Brooke's coming home?"

"Then why don't you talk about it?" insisted the old lady. "Instead you sit down at that table and let that Bixby creature write you things out of a trashy romance and say your father — my husband — wrote them, about Philip."

Isabel, seeing now how inadequately mother had understood it all, became softly argumentative.

"But that, dear," said she, "is because Brooke is alive and Philip is 'over there.'"

"Don't say 'over there,'" interjected the old lady, with a sudden brutality startling even to herself. "Say he's dead — dear Philip, dear boy! — use the good old-fashioned terms."

Isabel was hurt now beyond the power of soft words to mollify, and her mother knew it. But in proportion to Madam Brooke's exasperated remorse, it only made her the more ruthless. She had a quick, deep nature that was forever fighting down these softer impulses and trying, at all costs, to come at the realities of things.

"Don't you see, Isabel," she began, "that's what it does to you to dabble in this unhealthy sort of business? You don't get any nearer what you call 'over there,' and you entirely unfit yourself for here. And whatever you may think of this world, here you are now; and what do you call yourself when you don't do the work of the place where you're put? I know what Philip would call it. A slacker! That's what Philip would say, Philip and Brooke. A slacker, a quitter, that's what they'd say."

"It is something to do for this world," said Isabel, in a soft monotone of resistance. "Do you know any bigger thing than proving spiritual communication between this world and the next? Think of all the mothers — O mother, how can you!"

"And yet," said Madam Brooke astutely, "Brooke is coming home. He's coming now. You expect him any day."

"Why, yes," said Isabel a little wildly, as if something had been proved against her at last. "Of course we expect him."

"And yet you're not even going on to New York to meet him. You're going to sit here watching that Bixby write on wall paper."

"Well," said Isabel, leaping at an excuse, though she knew and was crushed by the sudden realisation of it, that deeply as she was moved by the thought of her son's return she had not thought of meeting him, "Peter isn't going either. He hasn't mentioned it."

"Mentioned it," mocked the old lady, now angry indeed at such lack of comprehension of the man they had both known for thirty years. "Do you suppose he'd mention it when you didn't, and let you think he'd got more heart than you? That's not Peter. I've a good mind to go on to New York myself. Only he'd be bored to death at having to take care of me. I'm glad I didn't invent old age. It must have been the devil."

And then came a diversion greatly needed. A girl's young and resonant voice called from the doorway:

"May I come in?"

II

THIS was Beatrice Hayden, an intimate of the family, the familiar friend of Philip and of Brooke. The voice told a little about her in advance, outwardly cool, with a more than youthful self-possession never, from lack of a fine decorum, leaping the border into assertiveness, a clear eye for the values of life and an ordered precision in maintaining them. She had the beauty flowered out of the right kind of fine descent. An English girl she might have been, long limbed, velvet cheeked, thin from an athletic hardness, with sweet blue eyes and a firm yet smiling mouth. Madam Brooke's eyes dwelt on her as if she were a flower bordered spring in a dry land.

"Come along in," said she. "What do you mean by staying away all day yesterday?"

Beatrice, entering, laughed and, though she was not forward with proffers of tenderness, kissed them both, for they evidently expected it. She was dressed in gray with gray furs. She completed the group beautifully. They were very pleasing to the eye, three ladies in the gray room. Then, seating herself at Mrs. Harvey's inviting gesture, she looked from one to the other in doubtful expectation. She had come with a definite purpose. That was evident. And it was like her to begin at once, with no indirection.

"I saw by the paper," she said, "you may expect Brooke."

"At once," announced Brooke's grandmother with em-

phasis, as if she had to insist on it when there was so much wobbling over the return of living sons. Her daughter commented with a little involuntary sigh, and Madam Brooke was glad to hear it. Sometimes, like all men and women of a mind like a sharp-edged sword, she was a little cruel to less definite minds. Now a deeper flush came into Beatrice's cheeks and her eyes dilated in a way they had, startling you with the vividness of their added beauty. But their gaze did not waver in the minute while she pondered just what she should say and how to say it. Meantime Isabel had proffered gently, as a way of telling her how dear she was to them, how immediate to their hearts:

"You'll run over, Bee? We'll telephone you when we know more definitely. I'd like you to be here when he comes."

That gave Beatrice the opening she needed. She laughed a little and this with some indication of embarrassment.

"No, Mrs. Harvey," she said. "It's dear of you, but I won't come over. And what I really came now to ask you is, don't mention me to Brooke."

Grandmother looked at her with a sudden keen glance, but Mrs. Harvey said impetuously:

"We shouldn't have time to mention you. He'll ask for you the first thing."

Beatrice accepted that gravely, and passed on to the next step of her argument.

"Yes, of course he'll ask for me. But don't speak of me in connection with Philip."

Madam Brooke nodded.

"I see," she said. "That is, I guess I do. You want to begin with Brooke where you left off. You don't mean to bring up any of the things we've got hold of

since Phil died. He's got to catch on first. That's what he'd say. You'd rather we'd go into it with him first, and tell him — "

She hesitated, and Isabel went on as if she were adjusting something for the girl, burying the outlines of it under layers of soft affection.

" Yes, of course we should tell him you're one of the family now and have been ever since that day — "

" The day the news came about Phil," said Beatrice, " and I went to pieces in this very room and you saw how I felt about him." She said it with a perfect composure of voice and look. And yet the next sentence came impetuously, and her eyes were wet. " Oh, haven't you been good to me, all you Phil's folks! If I'd really known he — liked me " — here she hesitated and went over the jolt bravely — " if he'd said it before he went and left me — well, as I wish he had — if we'd thought more about such things anyway! "

She ended with a dash of brave audacity.

" If you'd been married," said Madam Brooke. " Yes, that would have been the way. But it's just as I told you, just like Phil, like Brooke, too. Dear darling fools, both of them, born romancers and not finding the road other men take till they've stumbled and picked themselves up a dozen times and banged their noses and their shins. Isabel, I don't see where you got two such scatter-brains. You're commonplace enough. So'm I. So's Peter. No," she added, with an afterthought, " Peter's a little queer himself, though he keeps it under pretty well."

" I believe," said Beatrice, with a little smile, her tribute to their unexcelled dearness, " you meant just what you said, that first day, when you asked me to throw over Auntie and come here and live."

"We certainly did mean it," said Isabel. She had possessed herself of the girl's hand. "That's one reason why I'm so anxious to get a satisfactory message from Phil. He must have something to say — "

She stopped, for Beatrice had winced and, with the slightest involuntary movement, freed her hand. Isabel Harvey, in her own immediate household, was surrounded by the unbelieving.

"But," Madam Brooke began, "aren't you cutting it a little bit fine, this leaving Brooke in the dark? He knew Phil as well as if they'd been twins. They don't look so much alike for nothing. He knew just what sort of a dreamy, unpractical lad the lad was, and that he could have loved a girl down to the ground — "

"Yes, Bee, I'm sure he did love you," interrupted Isabel, "now I think back."

"And not say a word to her when he went away. Brooke's the last person not to understand."

"Oh, he'd understand," said Beatrice, "old Brooke. Only Brooke's dreamy, too, Brooke's imaginative, though it's in another fashion." She gazed at them intently, a beautiful look of frowning earnestness. She hoped to impress them with her view of the event. "I want you to promise not to talk to Brooke about me. I don't want him to be influenced into taking your attitude. I don't want him to say, 'They've adopted Bee for their daughter because they think Phil was in love with her.' For he'd come into the combine like a shot, and I want him unprejudiced. Because, you see, he might happen to think of something. He might say, 'Phil said so and so about Bee.' "

Madam Brooke nodded her perfect understanding, but Isabel commented in a worried tone:

"He'd say that anyway."

"Oh," said Beatrice, as if now she had something to combat that would make it all the plainer, "that's just the point. He's such a dear fellow he'd go too far. He'd be most awfully sorry for me and imagine what message he'd send a girl if he were in love with her, and then he'd think Phil sent one."

Isabel looked as if something might be resented here.

"I don't think," she said, "that's quite fair to Brooke."

"Of course it's fair," said her mother promptly. "She isn't saying Brooke would invent anything consciously. She's only remembering he can write stories and act plays."

Beatrice smiled at her, thanking her as she often did for their communion of understanding.

"But if," she said, "no matter how long I waited, we were sitting here by the fire, for instance, and something began to knock in his brain and he burst out, that way he has, 'One night Phil said to me, "Bee's the only girl I ever liked," ' why, then I should know it was true."

This was Isabel's opportunity, the sort she was seizing upon a dozen times a day, only to be rebuffed by one or another of them, and she embraced it the more fervently because it was so often checked.

"O my darling," she said, "why not try the automatic writing and get Phil to tell you himself?"

Bee looked at her sorrowfully and shook her head.

"Couldn't believe it, dear. I couldn't help thinking the pencil stole it out of my brain. But now — promise. You're not to speak of me unless he asks."

"Of course he'll ask," Isabel insisted all over again, in her jealously affectionate antiphony.

"And when he does, you're not to speak with special affection — special anything. Just say, 'Bee's well. Great strong moose of a creature, she's always well.' "

"You'll have to speak to Peter," said Madam Brooke, remembering her son-in-law's intimate understanding of the girl and his silent tenderness over her in her strange position of having confessed her love for a man who might not have recognized his own for her.

Beatrice turned on her the clear sincerity of her look. "I have told him," she said. "I stopped in the library, and he agreed with me perfectly."

"Yes, he would," said his wife, in that helpless admiration she had for him, always, as he was, taking short cuts along the unobtrusive way of his intuition and being to people the comforter she herself aspired to be: only she had to have everything explained. The two sons were like their father. They were altogether what was a mere strain in him. Somebody had once named it poetic, and she had felt a relief in hearing it classified and being able to put it away as something she need not try to understand. But heretofore she had acquiesced in it and followed humbly on.

"All right, Bee," she said, "we'll do our best." Then Susanne appeared with a card, and she read aloud: "Miss Andrea Dove. Do I know her?" she added, to herself, and sat a moment mutely interrogating her memory.

"The young lady said," Susanne offered, "it was something connected with psychical research."

Susanne was not more learned than became her position, but she rattled off the last words glibly. She had heard them a great deal in this house, within the past weeks, and they had a confused yet vivid meaning for her. She saw ladies sitting at a table persuading ouija and planchette, or latterly a common pencil. She heard Mrs. Harvey proposing this or that excursion to other tables and other pencils, and Mr. Harvey's tentative objection, "Must you, dear?" To her tolerant mind, used to the

vagaries of the employer class, which might wallow in idleness if it chose, but mysteriously preferred eccentric activities, psychical research was no more important than any other plaything of an empty day. But her delivery of this added elucidation had upon Mrs. Harvey an immediate determining effect.

"Yes, indeed, I'll see her," she said. "Show her up here."

After Susanne had left the room, Madam Brooke, who was always most careful to preserve the decent reticences between the family and "below stairs," forbore to sniff until the maid had got well outside the door; then she did it with somewhat diminished effect, owing to the delay. This she realised. A sniff, she knew, had to be served up hot. But her daughter looked at her with an undiminished sweetness of appeal.

"I shouldn't dare," she said, "turn any one away. It might be a message. It might be Phil."

"It might be a gold brick," said Madam Brooke ruthlessly, "or a messenger from Mars selling stock in the canals."

"I'll run along," said Beatrice. She couldn't forbear touching Madam Brooke on the hand, in passing, a tiny admonitory tap telling her how naughty she was and yet so much in the nature of a caress that it emphasized her dearness also. "Love to Brooke — when he does ask for me, you know."

She snatched up her stole and muff and was gone, and presently there was Susanne again, vanishing at the entrance of Andrea Dove, who paused just over the threshold as if not so much mutely interrogating those who were in the room as presenting herself for scrutiny and, if it might be, acceptance. The mother and daughter gave her a look of inquiry which settled at once into sat-

isfied approval. Andrea Dove had beauty of a high type. She was tall and slim and moved with an easy grace. Her hair was the rarest bright gold touched with red and her skin a faintly flushed perfection fitted to it. She was as unlike the girl who had just gone out as it is possible for two individuals of evidently the same social plane to be. Beatrice, in her gallant bearing, suggested the conventional, the rightly "placed," and Andrea looked as if she had seen strange circumstance, perhaps been driven too hard and too far and felt a little breathless with it all. Madam Brooke found herself thinking she looked as if she had been out in the wind and it had swept and buffeted her until her eyes ached with it and her nostrils, when she turned to face it, were blown wider. There was something apprehensive in her gray-eyed glance. She looked, indeed, as Madam Brooke also concluded, highly nervous, as if strung up to a task she feared. All this was in the instant she stood there, before Mrs. Harvey, in a forward movement, indicated a chair and spoke her name, again with reference to the card. Andrea Dove took the chair and began at once in a low, painfully hesitating voice:

"Mrs. Harvey, I hoped you might be in need of a secretary."

Mrs. Harvey's expectant gaze cooled. "This," it seemed to say, "is not connected with psychical research." But she answered promptly:

"I have a secretary. She is entirely satisfactory."

"Let's hear what the young lady has to say," put in Madam Brooke. "I'm not sure your Bixby's so satisfactory you never want to think of anybody else."

"How did you hear of me?" inquired Mrs. Harvey, who was always loath to dismiss a suppliant unsatisfied.

Her husband often told her, with the tender under-

standing he had of her, that she believed in cutting off the dog's tail an inch at a time. The moment she asked the question it seemed to ease Andrea off on the second lap of her dreaded task. It looked as if in a moment, now that the interview had begun to move as she imagined it, she might be in full swing.

"I saw your name," she said, "as giving a large sum of money to psychical research."

"Are you," Mrs. Harvey asked, the keenness of her interest whetted again by this slightest of hints, "interested in psychical research?"

"More," said Andrea, "than anything else in the world — almost."

The last word seemed to be an afterthought, springing from some deep imperative memory. But Madam Brooke hardly took note of the word and all it might imply, so discouraged was she by the girl's confessed interest in things unseen. As they pervaded this house they were, to the old lady, no more than an unpicturesque and disorderly form of witchcraft. There could be no doubt of the honesty of the girl's enthusiasm. Her face glowed under it. Her eyes met Isabel Harvey's brilliantly. She smiled a little, as if turning aside from a too eager pursuit of her aim, and said:

"I've been studying stenography and typewriting. I hoped you wanted a secretary. Then when you knew me I could ask you for what I really want."

"And what do you want?" prompted Mrs. Harvey.

The girl answered directly:

"Money."

Madam Brooke drew a quick breath which was not a snort but very near it. She found everybody nowadays seeking, with a sad unanimity, this one medium of worldly advantage, money. Sometimes they veiled their

purpose and seemed to seek something else while they at the same time put out the stealthy claw of cupidity. But this girl frankly wanted it and said so. Madam Brooke was neither surprised nor disappointed as her daughter was.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Harvey, temporizing, "that was what you learned stenography for."

"Yes," said Andrea. "We've almost nothing to live on and I thought — "

"We?" put in Madam Brooke.

"My father and I. I thought, if I could be your secretary you might pay me six hundred dollars a year. And if you would advance me a part of it, my father could use it in his work. We could live on what I got by copying in the evening. I should think I might get copying, shouldn't you?"

This she addressed to Madam Brooke as if her harder surface indicated a faculty for pronouncing on the validity of a copyist's ambition. But the old lady was ready for her.

"Undoubtedly," she answered.

She simply couldn't help it, the girl seemed to her so honest and indeed compelling in her clarity.

"How much do you want in advance?" Mrs. Harvey asked, almost fretfully.

She too believed in the girl, but she felt no confidence in her own nose for bargains. She knew how inevitably she was allowing herself to be led — or, indeed, wandering wilfully — into one of those paths from which her husband had to pluck her at intervals, for invariably they ended in purlieus where the undeserving flourish on ill-gotten gains. Now Andrea did recoil from her task.

"Quite a large sum," she faltered.

"How large?" asked Madam Brooke.

"Five hundred dollars."

"But why," again Mrs. Harvey asked, "why come to me?"

"Because," said the girl again, "you are interested in psychical research." Then she laughed a little sudden laugh, as if finding herself more stupid than she had imagined. "How badly I do it! " she said, with an honest directness they both found charming. "You see I ought to have told you first about father, not about me. My father is a scientist. He has always believed in communication with another world."

"Wait," said Mrs. Harvey. She got up, pressed an electric button and Susanne appeared. "Susanne, ask Mr. Harvey to come here." Then, as Susanne departed, she turned to Andrea and explained, with no diminution of excitement: "I feel as if you were going to say something very interesting. I want my husband to hear."

III

WHEN Peter Harvey came in, he found his wife and Andrea Dove both standing, faces turned expectant toward the door. Madam Brooke had wheeled round to the fire and sat rigidly erect, back obliquely to the room, as if tacitly repudiating whatever might occur. Peter Harvey was a man something over fifty, of middle height, generously but not heavily built. His large-featured face, blue-eyed and florid, was arresting from its expression of an anxious tenderness, a look that dealt with life as it did with individuals, as if he had reflected deeply upon the phenomena of things human, found them inscrutable and despairingly given them up: but not renounced them in any sense of shirking the anxiety of still further coping with a system not understood. On the contrary, he was instant in eager service at even the unspoken appeal of the fellow wonderer, and now he came forward to his wife with the look of receptive inquiry he so often found her challenging. She was flushed and eager, a little nervous, and he recognized the look sadly as one he had become used to. She had, he was resignedly sure, discovered a new medium of communication with another world.

"Peter," she said, "Miss Dove — Miss Dove, this is my husband — Miss Dove has come to tell us about her father's work in psychical research."

Mr. Harvey bowed gravely to Miss Dove, recognizing in her face the reaction his wife too often roused in her

psychic ministrants. She went too fast for them. If they showed her a hope, she transmuted it into a certainty; she assumed they could work with the lightning rapidity of a magician stocked up with elixirs. This grave-eyed girl, whom he at once liked and, in spite of her tiresome errand, trusted in a surprising way, had come to bring them something, but not a master key to open all locks. That he knew, from long dwelling on the puzzle. There was no such key. Andrea, feeling the meeting was embarrassingly in her hands, plunged desperately.

"My father is a scientist."

This seemed to be the preamble she had provided herself with, the spring-board for her leap.

"Sit down," said Mrs. Harvey. Already her voice, in its premature certainty, was exultant. "Peter, sit here."

But Peter elected to sit elsewhere, so that he might get the light more fully on Miss Dove's face. She sat where Mrs. Harvey had indicated, clasping her hands in her lap. And the hands trembled. But Peter Harvey, his gaze on her face, absently remarked, in a way he had of putting down mental notes, that her eyes, lifted to his, wore an almost commanding look of sincerity. They bade you believe in her. They did not plead for it, in any way of ingenuous appeal. They made a calm statement of her worth.

"Since my mother died," she began, with a perfectly apparent effect of controlling her breath which had begun to come unevenly, "my father has been trying to get into communication with another world."

"Oh!" breathed Mrs. Harvey, in a rush of abandonment to this new solace. "You see, Peter. We were the very ones for Miss Dove to come to."

"How long ago was that?" Mr. Harvey asked of Andrea.

"That mother died? Nearly twelve years. Father isn't old, but he looks like an old man. All that time he's never stopped believing that some day he will do it."

"Establish communication?" Harvey prompted her.

"Yes. I tell it badly. I don't know just how far to go back. But father is a scientist, you see. He used to teach. He is a professor — chemistry. But about the time mother died my grandfather — her father — left us quite a lot of money and a place on Long Island, and father stopped teaching and gave all his time to trying to get into communication with the other world."

"Then you have money?" said Isabel impulsively.

Andrea smiled slightly, a sad little smile, and her brows were wistful.

"We had it, but father used it all up in his experiments. And the house burned down — the Long Island house. It caught from his laboratory." She shook her head, smiling in a rueful way. "I do tell it badly," she said. "I wish you'd ask me questions."

"These investigations you speak about," said Harvey, "what were they?"

"That's it," she said, with an air of relief. "The very thing it all hangs on I've left out. You see father believes that communication will come in a perfectly simple scientific way. He believes it will come suddenly, with some new discovery, and that it will seem no more miraculous than the telephone, for instance, or wireless."

Madam Brooke hitched her chair to an angle that implied a willingness to renew communication with this world if the other was to be so reasonably introduced.

"That," said she, pointedly addressing her son-in-law, "sounds more like it."

"Yes," said he, "there's some degree of reason in that. At least, if you're going to play with the idea in any form, it's less offensive."

"Play with it!" echoed his wife, in a tone of passionate rebuttal. "O Peter, we're not playing."

Her husband was near enough to reach out his hand and give hers, on the arm of her chair, a kindly touch. It admonished her to remember that, whatever road of investigation he had to take, he was always with her in the undeviating effort of protecting her from her credulities and guarding the path to her desire. Andrea, having now reached the point where she could whole-heartedly back her mission, threw off her air of studied concentration and spoke impetuously.

"And now he has done it."

"Has he heard from your mother?" cried Isabel Harvey.

She was keyed to an extreme of agitation.

"What is it he has done?" inquired Harvey, with his patient, unflinching moderation.

Andrea addressed herself to him.

"He has discovered a new element. It is something like radium, only, he says, in every way more powerful."

Isabel's face had fallen. A new element, an element sounding to her something like a feature of the weather, seemed to her far from the magnificent climax of her hopes.

"Where did he discover it?" pursued Harvey, looking at her intently from under wrinkled brows.

She stood his scrutiny. Madam Brooke noted that, wind-blown as she was, she seemed for the moment to be standing in some sheltered corner where she could collect herself and think.

"In pitchblende."

"Where they found radium."

"Yes. And he had to have tons and tons of pitchblende and other things that used up our money."

"What reason has he for thinking it has anything to do with another world?"

Andrea looked at him with an intensifying of that compelling sincerity of her eyes.

"Why," she said, "he's got flashes."

"What do you mean by flashes?"

"They're long and short. They spell out words, just as the telegraph does."

Peter Harvey sat looking at her, more and more sorry for her. "Poor child!" was coming from his lips, but he shut them on the words.

"From your mother?" his wife was asking, in the mounting excitement he knew. "Were the messages from her?"

"No," said Andrea. "Not from anybody we know about. That's what drives father almost wild. He can't get connected sentences. They're words here and there. But they all say the same thing. And he is perfectly sure they mean he hasn't enough olympium — that's what he's named it — to work with. They're urging him to get more."

"How much of this thing has he?" inquired Harvey. "Not that it would mean anything to me."

"A quarter gramme. And he must have more. Don't you see he must have more?"

Here was an appeal from the real heart of her, no ordered argument she might have brought from some one else, but the cry of protecting love for the creature it nurtures and succors.

"You say," Harvey began hesitatingly, with the delicacy of one forced to tread ground not yet firm under him,

"your house on Long Island burned. You still have the land?"

"Oh, no," said Andrea, in a perfect clarity. "That was mortgaged. They've done — what do they call it? — taken it away from us. It isn't ours."

"And why did you come on here?"

He asked the question with an almost conciliatory gentleness, as if begging her to remember he was considering her side of the question and not his own incidental connection with it at all, and that he was trying to give her a just hearing, that he meant even to be generous.

"Father thought it might be less expensive. Besides," her look of liquid appeal resting on him with a confidence he was quick to interpret, as indicating she believed there was no need of concealing anything from his sympathetic gaze, "we knew you lived here."

"I?"

The word betrayed his perfect wonderment.

"You, your family," she said gently. "We knew Mrs. Harvey had given all that money for psychical research."

Harvey rose, took a quick turn about the room and came back. He could have groaned, in futile despair over it all. Yet he was glad he hadn't indulged himself in that bodily easement of the natural man. He wouldn't for worlds have had her repent her ingenuous disclosure. So they had come on, attracted by the lure of the gift he had so unwillingly allowed his wife to make to a new and obscure association of dabblers in mysteries they knew not what. It was one of his temporising concessions, buoyed by the despairing hope that it might solace Isabel and let her get breath until he could draw her at least a step away from these anomalous explorations. And now a father and daughter, the daughter at least appealingly honest, had caught the gleam of the benefaction and

dumped themselves on him in a trustful expectation of more.

"If," said he weakly, seeking another avenue somewhere, he did not know where, "your father is a scientist, he must have a wide acquaintance among men of his own profession. He must have told them all this."

"No," said she, in a depressed tone, as if this were another of the discouragements involved, "Father hasn't had anything to do with scientific men for a good many years."

"Oh!" said Harvey. And all that occurred to him to add was, "I'm sorry for that."

But she had her answer brightly ready. It came to him that she had needed to repeat it to herself at moments of her own inevitable questioning. That was why it came so pat.

"Don't you see?" she said. "They didn't believe in him. They couldn't, literal men like that."

"But," said Harvey, "there's been a good deal of romance in scientific research. In a way, it's a sort of guessing, full of surprises, if you come to that. Literal chaps have had to get used to it. A scientific man ought to be the sort of fellow that's prepared for anything."

"Oh, but they're not," she said, with a conclusive certainty. "Father says so. He's explained it to me."

So, Harvey thought again, she had had to go to him for her own reassuring.

"He says," she went on, "that they won't accept anything but proof."

"No, of course not," put in Harvey, and Madam Brooke offered an impatient:

"Why, no, child, that's what science is."

"I mean," she said, flushing, as if, though she knew exactly what point she meant to make, she found herself

blocked by some incredulity of her own in offering it, "they're not sympathetic. When you've only half proved something, they've no use for you until you give them the whole."

"Nevertheless," said Harvey, "I should say a scientific man would find his colleagues helpful to him."

"And," she continued, lifting her head a little as if this might not be a peculiarity to advance and yet she was determined to be proud of it, "maybe father wanted to keep his own discovery to himself till he could offer it to the world. It would be a shame if he should work all these years and then have some other man step in and take the credit, now wouldn't it?"

"Most unfortunate," said Harvey gravely. "Yet it happens."

And now Isabel, who had been looking from one to the other in a seething impatience, found herself unable to leave the issue at this lagging pace.

"But Peter," she said, "whatever scientific men might feel, it's perfectly clear what we ought to do."

He had known she would say that, though he couldn't have told at what point it would come, and he accepted it patiently. Madam Brooke used to repeat to herself, with the relish an accurate mind has for definitions of uncharted emotions: "That slow courage known as patience." It was the efflorescence of his feeling toward his wife, whom he loved with an unwavering devotion and protected at every turn from the consequences of her own gentle rashness. Now he gave her hand another warning touch and, instead of answering her directly, said:

"I should think the most practical thing is for me — for us — to see Mr. Dove."

Isabel nodded triumphantly. So assured was she of

the integrity of the issue that she felt perfectly certain the day was won. If Peter saw him, he would write a cheque. Harvey, glancing at Andrea to see how she took it, found himself warming at the eager delight that overspread her face. It was queer, he told himself inwardly, with a whimsical perplexity, how bent they three were on having her come out right, she and her mission. It seemed as if they had a recognised compact of belief in her. And as if joy brought its own intoxication she burst out into a little cascade of talking, telling them what they never would have thought of asking her: all about the everyday fortunes of olympium and how they guarded it from covetous hands. The world was against them, she implied, but smilingly, as if she did not fear it any more, now she had found them; and her father had invented the simplest as well as the cleverest scheme for hiding it. When she told them what it was, they admired it sufficiently and always the figure in the foreground, her father, with it. Then, without warning, the tears rushed into her eyes.

"It's wonderful," she said frankly, "to talk with somebody again, somebody like you. And father'll feel so, too. You'll question him and he'll tell you everything you want to know. It'll do him so much good. We've been very much alone."

"Then," said Harvey, pulling out his watch, "what if we should take you round there now, my wife and I?"

Mrs. Harvey made a little murmurous sound of approval and came to her feet, eager, Madam Brooke saw, with an inward lament over her credulity, to lose no time in getting her hat and cloak. But Andrea hesitated. She was demurring.

"If you don't mind," she said apologetically, "not just now. Not to-day."

Harvey felt rebuffed. She wasn't meeting them with the satisfactory promptness he had expected.

"Oh, very well," he said, and Andrea, seeming to guess how she had impressed him, at once explained:

"Father's not strong. It would startle him. Do you see?"

"Perfectly," said Harvey, relinquishing his plan. "It doesn't matter. We'll go another day."

But he was plainly aware that he had wanted to come upon father before the scene could be set to influence or hamper him in any way. There might not be any such way, but he was hard-headed and keen in the measure of his kindliness, and if he was to help father along the difficult road of achievement, he could do it only according to his own consistencies.

"But," said Andrea, rising, "if you could come to-morrow? Could you?"

She looked at him in anxious expectation. It was perfectly apparent she had weighed the value of Isabel's enthusiasm, and knew there was no need of whipping it up further. But Isabel answered:

"Yes. To-morrow morning. You could, Peter, couldn't you?"

"Yes," said her husband, rather drily. "In case Brooke isn't due. But he'll telephone us, no doubt, from New York."

Madam Brooke gave a little murmur, a commentary, Isabel knew, on the incredible fact that she had become so absorbed in this chase of the unknown that she had forgotten her son's return. Isabel flushed.

"Of course," she said, in a low tone, as if she defended herself and was ashamed of the necessity. "Of course I meant if he doesn't come."

"Then," said Harvey, "shall we say ten? eleven?"

"Ten, please," said Andrea, and rose to go.

But as she turned, her eyes fell for the first time on the picture by the window niche, the young man in his aviator cap and coat. She stood, blanched and petrified, staring, and Harvey took a step forward, thinking she was going to fall. He had no experience of the modern girl's fainting, but for that instant he was sure the girl before him had lost her grip on conscious life. But she evidently got hold of something vitally controlling. She swayed, recovered herself and stood for a moment as if she were commanding her blood back to its task. But her eyes did not leave the picture. She spoke in a choked yet steady voice:

"Who is that?"

"Why," said Isabel, "that is my son. You knew I had lost my son."

"Mr. and Mrs. Harvey," said Madam Brooke inexorably, as if she were reminding her daughter that she was not alone in the rich heritage of grief, "have lost their son."

Andrea spoke again, and now as if from a horror she could not accept:

"Was he — your son?"

"Yes," said Harvey patiently, "this was our son. He was an aviator. He was killed."

He had never shirked direct statement of that fact. Perhaps he was the more unflinchingly direct because his wife indulged herself in all the palliating divagations to indicate death. One of them, at which Peter shuddered, was that Philip had "passed over into spirit life." His curtness was the dignified reaction from her dodging the stark issue. Only so, it seemed to him in his unspoken protest against draping death with the tinsel of revolt, could he preserve his awe before the wonder of it and bear

the anguish of it at all. Andrea gave a little moan, instantly suppressed. In spite of her determined quietude, she had become wild-eyed. Her face was drawn and white.

"To-morrow then," she said, and, without a civil pretence of a conventional leave-taking, she was gone.

IV

At the foot of a West End street that runs down hill to the river, where reclaimed old houses stand in neighborly nearness to queer shops and accommodation for motor cars and beasts, is a stable of no great size which had been taken as a daring speculation by a young decorator, to do over into a bizarre sort of display and salesroom with what might prove, as fortune favored him, janitor's quarters or his own. This was at the beginning of the war, and he went off at once for service, desperately disposing of his holding to a firm that could neither let the place at once as it was nor enter upon the risk of remaking. This was the home Professor Dove had fallen upon in his search through the lower streets of the West End for inexpensive quarters that would give him space and privacy. The interior had been cleaned and sheathed, the latter roughly, because the young decorator had great schemes of stained backgrounds and tapestries of sorts, the plumbing was honest, and a partition cutting off a third of the floor space ensured domestic privacy to whatever tenant might undertake the care of it. Within that third was now Mr. Dove's laboratory. He worked and slept there. Nobody entered it but himself, and so acutely nervous had he grown in the last weeks that Andrea was sometimes forbidden to enter it from day's end to day's end. He spread up his bed himself. At least she tried to believe he did, but in these

last desperate days of his despair over his halting project she thought it more likely that he threw himself down as he was and dozed away such part of the night as he found himself too exhausted for work. But day and night, she felt, in her passionate sympathy, were alike unfriendly to him. The street door opened into a small square hall, which had once been the office of the stable, and that into the room Andrea had fitted up for a general living room. The table at which they ate was in the middle of this room and her couch bed — a makeshift she had never heard of until she came within Boston's lodging area — in one corner. It was a forlorn scene of domestic expedients, dark, for it fronted north and was inadequately supplied with windows, dulled according to artistic theories inadequately carried out, but kept in the order of a ship's cabin and scrubbed exquisitely clean. Here, after her interview with the Harveys and on the heels of her agitation at the end of it, Andrea came, let herself in, stepped from the hall into the living room and began calling:

"Father! father!"

This was an almost unknown procedure. He was guarded, and always expected to be, from noise even so slight as that of her footfall outside his door. Sometimes, when he had been quiet too long at his mysterious tasks, she would creep to his threshold to listen and steal away again when she heard him stir. But this he did not know. Indeed, he thought little about Andrea except as another hand that helped him reach up to the sky and pluck down lightning to warm the hearths of men. He was as dependent on her and as little conscious of his dependence as the child on its mother's breast. Andrea threw off her hat and coat and mechanically put them in their place. But still she summoned him. The excitement that had

almost overthrown her before she left the Harveys was mounting higher now. She seemed desperately anxious to find relief from it, and involuntarily she called upon the one being near enough to help her. At her repeated cry, he came out from his room, perplexedly alarmed, irritated at the small commotion.

"Well? well?" said he. "What is it?"

He stood waiting for her to speak, half turned on the instant of halting, as if uncontrollably impatient to get back to his den. Andrea ran to him. She had lost all sense of his sacred immunity from interruption.

"Father!" she said again, in a low, sobbing voice, and clung to him.

Andrew Dove found himself in such an unfamiliar position that he could only look down at her irresolutely and turn a fraction more to that refuge of the laboratory. He put out one thin hand and touched her shoulder remindingly.

"Well," he said again, "what is it?"

But Andrea, her head bent until her face was hidden in his sleeve, could not at once reply. As they stood there, she in her trouble and he in a helplessness of perplexity that looked like age as vulnerable to grief as it was unfitted to defend itself, Andrea felt how miserable they were and how alone. Her father was not, as she so often told herself, an old man, yet the task he had set himself and his fevered activity in it had piled years upon him. He was a tall man, slightly bent in the shoulders, as thin as it is possible for the human frame to be. His delicate, high-nosed face was like a skilfully modeled structure, the fine ivory skin clinging, strained yet wrinkled, to the bones. It was a face of beautiful death, a sort of petrifying and marbling of the flesh. Only his eyes, black, burning, passionately fanatical, launched the

light that repudiated death. They waved the banner of unconquered life. They were so fiercely masterful that it seemed as if they alone might have compelled the frail body to its tasks. But in that moment he stood there, longing to get back to his work, perplexedly collecting his disturbed mind to meet this new onslaught of Andrea, suddenly the whole thing came rushing back upon him, the errand she had gone on, his urgent coaching of her for her part. She had succeeded. Her emotion could have no other cause. He was childishly impervious to the existence of any need but his own, and now, knowing she had come back to him with her errand accomplished, he thrust her from him a pace and shook her arm in impatient reminder.

"You've got it," he cried, in a high demanding voice. "You've got the money."

Andrea, rebuffed, collected herself in an uncomplaining way, and wiped her eyes, not looking at him. For a course of years that seemed long in her girl's life she had not demanded anything. In that onslaught of her emotions she had done it at last unthinkingly, and now he had reminded her that she must get herself in hand.

"Sit down," he said impatiently. He took a chair and sat resting his hand on the table, the thin fingers tapping. A look of eagerness came into his face. "How much?" he asked. "How much?"

Andrea, entirely her pitifully composed self, took a chair opposite him, and looked him gravely in the face, as if knowing she had to hold him to a fixed point of view. Else how should she get an instant's consideration of what she had to say?

"Father," she began, "I've got something to tell you."

"Of course you have," he answered. Her slowness irritated him. "Tell me how much."

She shook her head slightly. To his amazed comprehension she looked obstinate.

"Father," she said, leaning across the table and speaking with a determined gentleness of composure, "their son was an aviator. He was killed."

He looked at her a moment, frowning over the inexplicable change in her.

"Of course he was," he said. "That's why you went to them. That's why his mother gave the fund for psychical research."

"I knew he was killed," she said, "but I didn't know who he was."

"Why," said Dove quietly, watching her because she seemed so strange, "he was their son."

"But," she said, paying no attention to his attempts to guide her into a rational channel, "just as I was going out I saw him, his picture. And I knew him. Father, I knew him."

His interest died.

"You'd seen his picture before," he said. "It must have been in the papers, a prominent family like that. I didn't see it myself, but it must have been there."

"Over a year ago," said she, in a mounting excitement that, in spite of his reason, began to communicate itself to him, "I took the long walk to the beach. At home, you know, father. Before the house was burned."

He nodded. It was all unnecessarily dull. He wanted to know whether she had brought him a promise of money and to go back to his laboratory.

"I'd been watching an air-plane," she said. She talked fast now and with a succinctness that told she had often been over the story in her mind. "It came down. Something was the matter. It didn't crash down. It just came, like a bird with a hurt wing. And I was there,

and the man in it saw me, and he called to me, and came, and we began to talk, and we talked all that forenoon. And I didn't go to the sea. And then another plane came. He knew the man in that. And I went away. And next morning I went back to the spot and they were gone. Of course they were. I expected it. But father, he was gone."

The intensity of her voice and the sad wistfulness of her brows might have told another sort of listener that this brief chronicle was the outline of her story of life. To Dove, waiting to get her report of the visit as it touched him, it had no extreme significance. But he was not going to be unkind to her, mysterious as this new mood was. He was never that, except by the indirection of things not done.

"And I didn't know his name," she said, in a musing wonder, as if now talking to herself. "Wasn't that strange, father? We neither of us told our names. And when he saw the other plane coming he said to me, 'Wait for me. I'll come back.'"

Dove did look at her now for an instant, keenly. It was dawning on him that this meant a great deal to her.

"And I see now," she said, with a certain sad triumphant satisfaction, "why he didn't come. He was ordered away — to France. And he was killed. And he's their son."

But though her father had, through that chink of revelation, caught an instant's understanding of her mood, he had had enough of this purposeless digression.

"Come, come," he said, kindly but decisively, "don't you see I'm waiting for you to tell me about going there and what happened?"

She was recalled. With a little start she came to herself, seemed to fold away the mourning garb of her re-

membrance, and settled herself to tell him what he wanted to hear. And now she was a different Andrea. It was all with that fictitious brightness the young so often adopt to cheer the old. The tone of it, the monotonous embellishment, was a fairy story, a "once upon a time."

"Well," she said, "I went to the house, and Mrs. Harvey saw me. It was in a pretty room and a nice young old lady sat by the fire."

But Dove was burningly impatient.

"I don't care anything about the room," he said. "How did you begin?"

"I don't know."

Then, as he raised his hand and brought it down on the table in exasperation at her slowness and stupidity, she gathered herself to tell it better and put out her hand to lay it on his, trembling from the blow.

"Oh, but I told her, dear. I told her you'd discovered olympium, and that you'd got flashes, and she sent for her husband to come in and he asked me questions — "

"What sort of man is Peter Harvey?" he interrupted, the burning eyes upon her.

She hesitated, thinking.

"Kind," she said, "oh, very kind. I loved him, father."

"What sort of questions?" he pursued.

"Whether you were in touch with other scientists."

He gave a little cry of extreme repugnance.

"I told him so, daddy," she said eagerly. "I said you'd got to work it out alone."

"Well? well?" he prompted. "What's the upshot of it? What will he do?"

"He's coming here," she said, watching his face in the triumphant certainty that now he would be pleased.

She never went so far as to think he might praise her. The past had dulled that expectation out of her.

"Here?" he cried incredulously.

"Yes," she nodded at him, smiling as if the climax of the fairy tale had come. "To-morrow."

"But," he said, in mounting uneasiness, "I can't have those people here."

The poverty of the place seemed to account for this.

"They know we're poor," she reminded him. "That's what I told them. That's the point. Do they think we'd ask them for money if we had it ourselves, even for a great splendid thing like this?"

"But what do they want?" he insisted. "What do they expect to get?"

"Why," said she, "I told them you'd had flashes that semed to be from something outside our atmosphere. They want to see them, don't you think? They want to see you and Mr. Harvey wants to hear you talk about it."

He turned his chair about so that he faced the table, and bent his head in his palms. He was infinitely pathetic so, the trouble of his face hidden behind the beseeching eloquence of those frail hands. She rose from her seat, in sudden passionate sympathy for him, and came round and touched his shoulder gently.

"O daddy," she said, daring no more than this. "O daddy!"

But at her voice he pushed his chair back, and hurried, bent and trembling, to his room, went in and shut the door. She stood a moment looking after him, painfully wondering whether her message which seemed to her all hope was in some mysterious way disconcerting to him, or whether he was actually glad and could not bear it. She sat down again at the table and then, her own emotions imperiously constraining her, put her elbows on the table, buried her face in her hands and in that solitude of posture gave herself over to the swift tide of re-

membrance. It had promised joy and it now meant grief. She often had these periods, not of actual solitude, since her father might call upon her at any instant for some service, but solitude of the soul. Often and often she sat down to put her hands before her eyes, withdraw into herself and retrace every step in what she knew to be her love story. It seemed to her the most extraordinary story a girl ever had, like the lover himself, straight out of heaven. Even to her it would have been incredible except that in the upheaval of the world since 1914 strange things had come to pass. The earth seemed to have been rent not only on its surface but from the centre. Monstrous deeds had sprung from the underworld, noisome, fetid deeds cast up from the dregs of life hidden from sight and hearing in calmer times. And strange seeds were ripened, borne on the air from mysterious sources, seeds of self-sacrifice, of a wild hope and a quickly germinated love. She had been, as she said, taking the long walk to the beach as free from thought of man as any nymph of story, and he had come down from the air, again like legend, one of the gods made manifest. He had not fallen like Icarus, though indeed his magic chariot had perversely failed him. And when he saw her he forgot instantly that he had to repair damage and get away again, and they looked their hunger for each other and talked desperately — about nothing, actually nothing, as she remembered — and the other plane came down, she left him and he was gone. Yet his coming had remoulded her, mind and soul. It was plainly love, love at a glance. She had seen men enough to know he was different, of an impetuous clarity of thought and speech, an unworldly belief in the world as immortally young, not falteringly old, and a trust in it — such a dear and foolish trust, her own dreary experience told her, in its

playing fair. They were man and girl as we read about them in stories and poems and never dream of seeing them in the flesh. If we did, what should we do with them, fitting none of our tailor-made conventions? But there they were, he and she, girl and boy, immortal youth pledged instantly to immortal love. Did they say all this? No, not any of it; but she was as sure they had bound themselves by the great contract as if they had kissed and plighted troth. Such things do happen. There is a language of the heart that does not, in the first surprise of meeting, need the substantiation of the tongue. She did not know his name or the place where he belonged, and when he failed to return she only made up epic stories of the needs that kept him. She would not let herself mourn. The sight of him was denied her, but the untarnished image of him lived in her heart, and she gloried in her own faithfulness, which was her part of the epic deeds. And now the dark wings she had never let herself glance up at, though the shadow of them had many times threatened to engulf her, had descended. He was dead.

V

THE next day Andrea rose early and did anxious tasks about the living room before her father was astir. To the Harveys her little house would be queer enough, and she wanted it to offer a shining face. Her father, too, was early. When he came out, his breakfast of toast and coffee was quickly ready, and while he ate, in the perfunctory way he had, she sat opposite him and ventured on the ground she knew he would avoid.

"Daddy, you know they're coming here this forenoon."

He nodded, breaking his toast and sipping his coffee as, she often had occasion to think, an actor on the stage who, with eating set down in his part, gets it over in a fragmentary way.

"And," she went on, "they'll want to go into your room."

He set down his cup and looked at her in a threatening displeasure, as if she alone were responsible for that incursion.

"So," she continued, disregarding the look, as she often had to ignore his prohibitions, seldom comprehensible but always inseparable from his dearness to her, "I shall want to have it nice. I won't do much: make your bed, sweep a little, dust. Why don't I do it now?"

She rose, but he stretched a detaining hand.

"They're not," he said, "going into my room."

"But, daddy," she reminded him, "I've told them

you're getting calls. They'll want to go and have it explained to them. Mr. Harvey will. That's why he's coming, you know."

He took up his coffee cup and tossed the last of its contents down his throat. Then he rose.

"Nobody is going into that room," he said definitively, "nobody."

"But daddy, I as much as promised them you'd show them, you'd demonstrate. Is that what you'd call it?"

"Then you'd no right to. Why, my experiments—" he paused as if the scope of them made it impossible for him to include it in speech she could understand—"my experiments won't admit of people crowding in there, peering, handling—"

"Oh, they wouldn't handle," she assured him, with an eager softness. "Mr. Harvey's not that kind. He knows he's ignorant about scientific things. He'd own it. And as for Mrs. Harvey, you don't have to convince her. She believes already."

In that moment of even so slightly interpreting the Harveys, an undercurrent of thought was bidding her remember how strange it was, how marvelous beyond measure, that they should be father and mother of the vanished strength and beauty she had called her lover and that her lover should be dead.

"Then let her prove it," Andrew Dove cried triumphantly. "If she believes, all she's got to do is to write me a cheque as she did for psychical research."

Andrea shook her head. She went a little nearer his room with a soft obstinacy that surprised her as it irritated him.

"Only to dust," she said persuasively, "and make your bed."

But he passed her, went in and shut the door. Andrea,

rebuffed and momentarily angry over the obstinacy that threatened to defeat his ends, cleared away his breakfast and again ran over the dustless order of the room. A little after ten, when she could make no further pretence at a regulated scene setting and took up the knitting that often steadied her perturbed mind, she heard a car and, as she reached the door, their knock. There they were, a little disconcerting to her now in their out-door gear. They looked, in every detail, so moneyed that for the moment she forgot their kind faces and wished the old lady had come with them, she was so steadying. Her cards, you saw, were on the table. You knew she would, on exigent occasion, say the most drastic thing there was to be said and relieve you of apprehension of a worse to come. She was just, too, she was kind. There was no harm in that old lady, only a long experience of the world and a settled desire to be square in it, even if that involved being also a little trying.

But Andrea, though she was impressed, lacked no outward composure. She asked them in and was briefly interested to see the difference in the way they took the quaint bareness of the place. Isabel Harvey was frankly interested and delighted, as one has every right to be delighted with the queernesses of a spot where one isn't condemned to live; but her husband apparently noticed no difference between this and any conventional entrance and reception room. Yet Andrea was sure he did notice. He was sensitive enough, she knew, for the place to strike him to the bone, to give him an inward shiver at its unrelieved poverty and discomfort, and a pity that must hurt for her who had to deal with it and make it as little as possible like the waste it was. But he apparently saw nothing. He smiled upon her, courteously but not too warmly as indicating any special patronage and, after his

wife was seated, took the chair Andrea, in her scene setting, had placed near by. And now Andrea knew she had before her one of the hardest tasks of her strange life. She had to tell him that her father, dishevelled and wan from a night's vigil of work, had shut himself up in the room he called his laboratory, and that he refused to let them cross the threshold of that room where the demonstration for which he begged their money could alone take place. But before she had uttered a word of the dreaded explanation, her father himself gave her a surprise more complete than any presentation of his previous attitude could have given them. The laboratory door opened and he came out, shaven, composed, his threadbare clothes worn with such dignity that they seemed only to emphasise his deserts and the pity of it that he should be indebted to their forlorn use. He advanced toward the Harveys with a welcoming smile, a sweetness of expression indeed that Andrea had not seen for so long that she caught her breath at the memories it awoke. This was her father, as she and her mother had known him, and she saw, with a pang of terror lest he should be disappointed, how desperately he was clinging to the hope that the Harveys might do something to forward his dear desires. It was so desperate, this hope, that it enabled him to strike deep down into the depths of his forgotten self and drag up every resource he had to charm as well as to persuade. Peter Harvey got up to meet him and Andrea had time to see, as they shook hands, that her father's look was piteous to those discerning eyes. Mrs. Harvey, too, shook hands with him, with a murmurous interest and sympathy. She was making little kind noises in her throat and, though they might be promising she was ready to write the cheque at once, Andrea ceased thinking of her. The contest, if contest it could be called,

was, she felt, to be between her father and Mr. Harvey. Even she herself was not likely to be needed. It was all in her father's hands, and his present fitness of aspect seemed to imply that the hands were capable. Mr. Dove motioned Harvey to sit, but himself remained standing.

"You'll excuse me, won't you," he said, "if I stand? I get so nervous over this thing I have to walk about when I'm talking it over. But please sit. Please be comfortable. You'll want to question me. Do so. Ask anything you like. I'll tell you — if I can."

And now Andrea was even a more absorbed spectator than either of the others. She had to go painfully back again — and it seemed very far to go — to the days when her father entertained men of a dignified class of mind and manner and could give and take in the conversational exchange with an assured self-possession. And she realised that, alone with him all these last months, she had allowed herself to see him at the standard of his weakness. She had protected, served and shielded him. She had not admired and wondered at him as she did now. She leaned back in her chair as if withdrawing definitely from the interview, but she could not deny herself the pleasure of giving Peter Harvey one little triumphing look. "You see," the look said, "I didn't tell you anything really. I couldn't, for I didn't know myself how splendid he was going to be." Mr. Dove was gazing straight into Harvey's face with an unswerving directness that might have indicated he held himself tense by great effort. His hands, one at his side, one behind him, were trembling. That he could not govern, and he kept them closed. And sure as Andrea was that the duel of challenge and proof was between the two men, it was Mrs. Harvey who began.

"Mr. Dove," she said, with a certain direct acceptance

of him and his power which, though quieting, was absurd in advance of the first step they were yet to take, "do you think you could do something for us? Don't you think you could get me a message from my son?"

And her poor lip quivered so that Andrea made a little involuntary movement toward her and then sank back.

"Isabel!" her husband said, in an undertone.

Andrea thought, in sharp pity for him, that he almost moaned it, he was so sure his wife would upset all the logic of the event by saying the intemperate thing.

"But he can," Isabel argued, turning to her husband in a gentle reproach that he could deny her for a moment. "Your daughter said so, Mr. Dove. She said you'd got messages."

Andrew Dove did not answer her. He was interrogating her husband:

"You seem to object?"

"I do object," said Harvey, as if it hurt him to say it. "My wife is head over ears in automatic writing. But I don't mean to see her drown. I'm the life preserver. That's why I'm here to-day."

Mr. Dove's acute glance hardened somewhat. "Then," it seemed to comment, "you're here in her interests, not in mine." But Isabel was speaking, with a piteous persuasiveness.

"You see, Mr. Dove, it's my son."

"I know," said Dove, with a brevity that sounded curt. Andrea began to see how it was bruising him to meet these people after the manner of their own speech. "The aviator."

"Yes. And we do so want to get word from him. We want it terribly."

"Mrs. Harvey wants it," said Harvey, in a tone that sounded like crisp rebuttal of the whole thing.

"Don't you?" Dove asked him, as crisply.

"Not that way." He declared it obstinately as if he knew Isabel was going to be hurt by it and yet it had to be. "I hate the whole thing. If my son is trying to communicate with me, is he going to write poppycock through my wife's secretary, a woman I wouldn't trust round the corner?"

"But if he is trying," put in Isabel, looking so soft, so beseeching, that it was easy to see how she could persuade her husband, sceptical though he was, to write cheques for indeterminate ends, "oughtn't we to accept it, whatever way it comes? Don't you think so, Mr. Dove?"

Dove stood looking down at his shabbily shod feet as if they alone held the solution for him.

"I can tell you," he said slowly, "how the thing presents itself to me. I know there's humbuggery. Wait," he added. Isabel was about to speak, and he put up his hand. "The millions of dead — they've gone somewhere, haven't they?" He was interrogating Harvey, who gave a nod in answer. "They've gone — somewhere," Dove repeated. "But it's a ramshackle universe. We haven't got it in order yet — "

"God — " interrupted Mrs. Harvey timidly, as if the one word were sufficient; but he did not even hear her.

"We haven't got it in order. And there are the memories of the dead. We're tangled up in 'em, and they hoodwink us into accepting all sorts of deviltries. Yes, it's deviltry. But there's one thing that will do the trick. Science. Invention. The mind of man. Would you have believed in wireless twenty-five years ago? The time is coming when you'll call the stars as easily as you call England."

"How long have you believed that?" asked Harvey.

Dove paused, considering.

"Perhaps," he said, "ever since I believed in wireless. Certainly ever since I discovered olympium."

"You are perhaps," said Harvey, "using wireless in illustration only. But you are also using radium as a means of describing your olympium. Now you don't mean wireless has anything to do with radium?"

"No," said Dove, with a carelessness almost contemptuous. "I don't mean that."

"But you do say your olympium has something to do with this interplanetary wireless of yours. And yet your olympium is of the nature of radium. I'm only blundering along in this, you see. I don't know whether I make myself plain."

"Yes," said Dove, with a tolerance so condescending that Andrea bent slightly toward him and seemed about to speak. "You make yourself plain enough. On the other hand, I shouldn't be able to make myself plain to you. You wouldn't understand."

Peter Harvey smiled and turned involuntarily to his wife. He wondered if this reminded her of anything, if she remembered how many questions were answered in her precious automatic writing: "Not in your sense. You wouldn't understand." But she was impervious to the implication and he turned back to Dove. The man looked innocent enough and Harvey doubted whether he had meant to be offensive. His eyes were still fixed upon his shabby shoes. Andrew drew a quick breath, thinking father would indeed have to make good, to satisfy that glance of Harvey's, as keen as it was temperate.

"In one word," Harvey said quietly, "have you got messages?"

Dove hesitated. Then he lifted his eyes and answered boldly:

"Yes."

The keen eyes did not waver from his face.

"Messages," repeated Harvey, "from some one you knew, it is to be presumed."

"I can't say," answered Dove, "whether they're from some one I know or not. And the only way I can find out is to put on more power."

"Why don't you do it then?"

"That's precisely it," said Dove impatiently and yet with a sort of triumph, as if now they had run the race of conjecture and were at the goal where he had meant to meet them. "We're going round in a circle. I can't get more olympium because I can't get money."

"Ah!" said Harvey softly. "Money."

Andrea, who was going along step by step with him, guessing out his reaction to her father's words, thought the repetition meant, "It's always money they want. Money!"

"Yes," said Dove violently. "To set my retorts going. To make more olympium."

Mrs. Harvey breathed her husband's name. He knew what that half-persuasive, half-mandatory "Peter!" meant. But now he had Dove upon olympium, he meant to keep him there for a practical interval.

"Tell us," he said, "all you can about your discovery."

Dove half closed his eyes and began reciting what he seemed to see inwardly, reading from a page.

"I'll tell you," he said, "some of the properties of olympium. Briefly, that is: if I went into it more exhaustively you wouldn't understand. And when it comes to that, I don't myself. But these are some of the things it can do. If I take a vacuum vessel of liquid air and drop into it a small glass tube containing a quarter gramme of olympium, the liquid air will boil. But you can't detect the slightest loss of weight in the olympium that has been boiling it."

"Do you mean," said Harvey, "it does the stunts of radium?"

"Practically every one. It has a high degree of radio-activity. It ionizes the air."

Harvey shook his head.

"Got me there," said he.

Andrea, before she could stop herself, rushed in.

"My father means it makes the air a conductor of electricity."

But Dove ignored her and went on, evidently not proposing to explain in any amplitude adapted to the lay mind.

"I have made something that you might call a sort of mechanical toy. It has a plate of zinc sulphide, and that, when I bring olympium near it, gives off flashes. And those flashes are in the Morse code."

"The devil!" said Harvey, his mind trying to effect the conjunction Dove was evidently implying: a celestial telegraphy and the Morse code. "How do you account for that?"

"The Morse code," said Dove, "would be the logical result of some one who had at one time lived on this earth trying to communicate with it again."

"Peter!" said Isabel. Her hands were gripped on each other, and he knew what his name, in that low imploring, meant. "Write a cheque," it meant, "and don't lose time over this sluggish coil of testimony."

"Yes, dear, yes," he soothed her, and then, to Dove: "Go on."

"I leave it to you," said Dove. "If a spirit, we'll say — shall we say spirit?"

"Oh, yes," breathed Isabel.

"Yes, if you like," said her husband, with an air of accepting anything in the way of a theorem to be demon-

strated. "It's immaterial. That's not a pun." For Isabel had given a little sound of shocked dissent. "Lord, dear, no!"

"A spirit," said Dove, "that left this earth after telegraphy came into use, would know we had the Morse code. What is more logical than for the spirit who knew the code on earth to remember it? That is, if memory persists. What is more logical than for them—the scientific minds, still if their memory persists—to use the code they know we are accustomed to?"

"What about Socrates, for instance?" Harvey offered, with the air of himself finding it rather feeble. "Or William Shakespeare? They never used the Morse code."

"I can only say," returned Dove, with the dignity suited to a trifling interruption, "one has to start somewhere. I start with the Morse code."

"Peter," said Mrs. Harvey, bringing up her argument of a soft voice and glance, "Mr. Dove must go on with his investigations."

"Yes, dear," said Harvey. "But before I can act I must know more about it."

"But we can know," she insisted. "Can't we know, Mr. Dove? You can prove it. Why not bring your—what is it you bring near the olympium?"

"Zinc sulphide, madam," said Dove.

"Yes. And you could let us see the flashes. My husband isn't a scientific man, but I'm sure if you explained it, he'd understand something."

Dove had had from the first an air of considering her negligible, even when she made it most apparent that she was eager to mulct her husband of a cheque. Now he addressed himself to Harvey.

"I have never been able to get the slightest sign with

anything less than a quarter gramme. And even then I couldn't get an extended message."

"Don't you see," cried Isabel, "it's money he needs? That's all. If you knew you could get a message from Philip, what wouldn't you pay for it?"

"What, indeed," said Harvey sadly, "if we could!"

"But the chance," she urged. "Aren't we willing to pay for the chance?"

Harvey turned to Dove, who stood watching them both, almost as keen-eyed now as he.

"Where," he asked, "is your olympium?"

"There in that room."

He pointed to his laboratory.

"Let's see it."

"Mr. Harvey, it wouldn't mean anything to you."

"You know," said Harvey bluntly, "I can't put money on a dark horse. At least, willingly: sometimes I've had to," he added, his mind reverting to the sops he had thrown Isabel's devouring beast of credulity.

"But a chance," she was urging. "A chance!"

"The trouble is," said Harvey frankly, "— one trouble — it's distasteful to me. Sorry, Mr. Dove, but it is distasteful."

"What," said Dove, "can I do to meet you?"

"For one thing, let me see your olympium, touch it, handle it."

"And get a hole burnt in you?" Dove pulled up his sleeve and showed his wrist. "See there — and there. I'm as careful as any man in my profession, but I'm afraid of it. The thing is caustic as hell fire."

"Let me go into that room."

"That is my laboratory."

"Never mind. It isn't the black art, is it, divination and all that? Can't you let me stand in the doorway and see the thing work?"

"You'd laugh at me. The whole business is so primitive, just as I told you, a mere mechanical toy. And the thing it can do — that is one of the surprises that are always happening in science."

"Let me see your retorts."

"They are not here."

"Pardon me. You said you'd found this element. You spoke of retorts."

Dove seemed to shrivel and fade in this air of incredulity. It was to his daughter he turned, and her heart ached for him.

"Andrea," he said, "he doesn't believe me. Tell him."

"I have told him," she said, with some indignation. "I did tell you," she insisted, to Harvey. "I told you we lived on Long Island. We had our house then. It was there my father discovered olympium. He mortgaged the house and land to buy stock in the market — "

"Ah!" interrupted Harvey, "speculated."

"It was a sure thing," said Dove uneasily.

He had ceased governing the situation, Andrea saw.

"Yes," said Harvey smiling, though compassionately. "It always is."

"I was cleaned out," said Dove irritably. "But I'd made my quarter gramme of olympium."

"Well," said Harvey, after a pause, "well!" This was as if he abandoned the steps that led to the present moment and was ready to deal with the moment itself, take it on its own merit as an isolated argument without genesis or conclusion. "You've got your olympium. That is, you've a quarter gramme. Now turn on your power, set your mechanical toy going and let us see if you get a flash."

Isabel put the tips of her small gloved hands together in an ingenuous appeal.

"Yes, Mr. Dove," she implored, "if it's not too much to ask. They will help us."

"They?" repeated Dove, staring.

"Those that have passed over. My son," she said. "He must know. I have the strongest evidence that he is keeping in touch with us all the time. Peter, you know he'll help."

Again Harvey gave the little sound that, to Andrea, was like a lament over his wife's incorrigible belief; but either Isabel's plea or the decision he had come to determined Dove and he said, in a firmer tone than he had used:

"Will you stay here?"

"Yes," said Harvey, but he and his wife involuntarily rose from their chairs.

"I am going into that room," said Dove, pointing. "It is, as I told you, my laboratory. You must not follow me."

"Is the room dark?" inquired Harvey.

"Darker than this. You will have no difficulty in seeing the flashes from where you stand."

"Is there a sound?"

"Yes, there is a sound similar to wireless. It accompanies the flashes."

"Are the sounds in the nature of a code?"

"Yes, dots and dashes. If you can't read them I will write them out for you, and you can take them away to be verified."

Dove crossed the room to the laboratory door, and with so light a step that Andrea gazed after him in wonder. She seemed to be looking on at the rejuvenation of what had, only a couple of hours before, been life failing to its close. He entered, leaving the door open behind him, and she saw that he must have pulled down the

shade at the one window, for the room was dark. There they stood, she and the Harveys, and so tense was their expectancy that she could not ask them to sit down again. For one reason, there seemed to be a lack of decorum in saying another word on the heels of the order her father had issued; it was only fitting that they should stand, in deference to the mystery about to be unveiled to them, their eyes upon the obscurity within the room.

VI

THE three stood there in silence, and for a long moment there was answering silence within. The situation told upon Mrs. Harvey, and she caught a gasping breath. Her husband moved nearer and put his hand over hers as it rested on the back of her chair. She gave him a quick grateful glance and a little smile and, feeling the trembling of the hand in his, he lifted it, and held it in a firm clasp under his arm. At the first flash she started, but obedient to his admonitory pressure, prevailed on herself to keep her eyes unflinchingly on the darkness through the open door. Now the flashes came fast, of irregular length and so impetuously that it was impossible to keep tally of them. Accompanying them was a zipping sound like wireless, after that silence for a tense moment that did much to heighten expectancy, and then a series of sounds like the clicking from a telegraphic apparatus repeated over and over in the same order. These had hardly begun when Harvey started, raised his head slightly, frowned and seemed to key himself up to a more intent listening. He gripped his wife's hand so tightly that she thought at first it was a signal and looked at him as if begging him to interpret. But his face was so concentrated in its attention that she perceived he was thinking solely of the machine. And suddenly the clicking ceased, there was silence in the dark room and Dove came out, walking no longer like a young man in his strength but faltering, even swaying slightly as if he

had taxed himself too far. Andrea started forward, and as quickly stopped. The inward monitor ever standing guard for him in her mind warned her that solicitude over him would be a species of betrayal. They must not see him at his weakest, now that he had called so desperately upon hidden reserves she had not suspected in him, for one last bit of serviceable bravado, one brave argument the more. He was proving himself in every nerve and muscle worthy of all the help they could give him. Isabel Harvey was speaking.

"What was it, Mr. Dove?" she besought him. "What did it say?"

He ignored her. He might not even have heard her at all. He was looking straight at Harvey, challenging, persistently confident.

"Well," he said, "you heard?"

"But we don't know," said Isabel, her delicate brows coming together, "what it said."

"I know," said her husband.

He looked disquieted. He had been prepared for fraud, but he was in no sense ready for the mysteries attendant on the man's making his claim good.

"Why, no, dear," said his wife. "It's like telegraphing. You don't know telegraphy."

"Oh, yes, I do," he said, with a rueful look that seemed to say he wished he didn't recognize this implication of a supernatural alphabet, "the rudiments anyhow. Before I was sixteen I was in an office. Mr. Dove?"

"Well?" said Dove expectantly.

A brighter spark lit up his eyes, or the spark that lived there had flickered into flame. Andrea hated to see it, meaning, as she knew it did, an intensity of expectation that might easily be dashed.

"You read it, of course?"

"Yes," said Dove. "It said—"

"Wait," Harvey interrupted him. "Let me get my note-book." He drew it from his pocket, tore out a page and slit that in half. "Take this bit of paper. Here's a pencil. Write down what your flashes said. Done it? Give me the pencil and I'll write it, too. Now we'll pass the papers to my wife and she'll tell us how they agree."

He took Dove's folded paper and gave it, with his own, to Isabel who, after some fumbling, found her lorgnon and opened one after the other.

"Why," she said, "they're just the same: 'Increase your power.'" And then the significance of it cleared before her and she added: "But of course they're the same. I don't see why you did it that way, Peter. I should have been just as well satisfied to have Mr. Dove tell us—or to have you, dear, of course."

"But it's proved," cried Dove, in a wildness of delight that drew the renewed inquiry of Harvey's glance. "He's proved it, don't you see?"

Isabel was puzzled at so exact a precision over so slight a thing when great issues were at stake.

"But I wish," she said, "we could have had something positive, something from Phil. Don't you think you could try it again, Mr. Dove? If you tried definitely now to get my son—"

"Wait, dear," said her husband gently. "We haven't proved anything except what the flashes say. They do read: 'Increase your power,' but we don't know any more than we did before about the way they are made."

"Why, Mr. Dove has told us. You may not understand it. I don't either. But I don't see any need of our understanding it, if we can get the message."

"Mr. Dove," said Harvey, "I suppose you have some

theory of the meaning of those words, 'Increase your power'?"

"It means," said Dove without hesitation, "that with a quarter of a gramme of olympium I can get that message from somewhere outside our atmosphere, and if I had more olympium and increased my power I should get other messages, maybe fuller ones, maybe from farther away. I am willing to swear I should hear what some other world is waiting to say to this one."

"Oh," said Isabel, trembling so that her husband and Andrea, whose eyes were on her now, felt a new pity for her, "that's the very thing he's trying to prove to us. He must have money to make more olympium and increase his power. Peter, it isn't possible you don't see."

"Wait, dear," said her husband patiently. "We haven't come to that yet."

But her desire was so overwhelming that she pushed on, past his entreaties, past his known desires.

"We mustn't be blind," she said, her pathetic lip trembling. "How often have we said we wouldn't shut ourselves up in our prejudices. Even mother owns that, though it's about other things. We're not the only ones waiting for news. It's the whole world. Mothers, Peter, waiting for their sons!"

Harvey yielded to a counter deduction long enough for a little whimsical twist to curl the corners of his mouth. "Fathers, too, perhaps" was the inevitable retort if he had permitted himself one; but indeed there was no slightest temptation. She was too deep in her bewildered misery.

"Why," she was saying now, in an impulsive conviction impressive even to Dove, so that his eyes left Harvey and turned searchingly on her, "if giving him every cent we've

got would bring such a discovery one minute nearer, don't you see we're bound to give it?"

"She understands," broke in Dove, as if he felt his triumph already in his hands. "Women don't reason; they see. My daughter has seen from the first. She has devoted herself to carrying it through."

Andrea gave him a grateful but also a wondering glance. This was the first time she had known him to commend the quality of her devotion. Harvey had stood thinking while these last things were said, his wife's persuasions and Dove's response. Now he turned to Dove with a business man's succinctness when he comes to terms.

"I'll make you," he said, "a proposition."

Isabel Harvey, throwing Andrea a little smile, impulsively put out her hand. Andrea, grasping it, again thought for a bewildering instant that shot into this present interview like a ray of unexpected light, how strange it was that this should be the mother of her lover who had died. They clasped hands and stood there as if allied in their impatience and their hope. But Dove, to Andrea's amazement, expecting, as she had, to see him give some sign of unequivocal joy, looked merely thoughtful.

"I will bring," Harvey went on, "three scientific men of the highest standing to this room to-morrow morning, and you shall give them a demonstration."

"What do you mean by a demonstration?" asked Dove, frowning.

"Very little. I'm prepared to accept a minimum of proof. If you get the message we have just read and they agree that you get it legitimately — "

"What do you mean by legitimately?" put in Dove.

"I hardly know how to tell you," said Harvey frankly, "without being offensive. For I'm not, as you see, a

scientific man. You could — anybody could — impose almost any sort of ingenious trick on me — "

"Peter!" cried his wife. "Oh, you don't mean that! No, Mr. Dove, he doesn't, not in the way it sounds."

She was begging Mr. Dove, it seemed, to show a leniency of judgment her husband might not deserve but that should benevolently be shown him on the score of his ignorance of scientific values. But Dove took no notice of her, only repeating thoughtfully to himself:

"A trick!" and then concluding: "What then?"

"If," continued Harvey, "they agree that, to the best of their knowledge and belief, the flashes and accompanying use of the code constitute a message, and that the message cannot be accounted for by any data known to them, I will stake you to the extent of five thousand dollars."

The two women, with an according impulse, smiled at each other, Mrs. Harvey tearful in her gratitude and Andrea glowing. But Dove, looking deeply thoughtful, repeated, as if to himself:

"Five thousand dollars."

He showed no sort of recognition of the offer in any personal sense, either gratitude or relief, and the two women, surprised, each after the nature of her interest in the question, turned to him with an identical desire of saving the situation by prompting him to some sort of adequate response. But Harvey had not looked for an impetuous acceptance. He might not have been surprised at it, had it come, but he was simply making a business proposition and in the world where such things are commonplaces, men hardly make an emotional matter of them. He continued:

"If within the next three months after receiving the five thousand dollars you come upon any further result

that, by a consensus of scientific opinion to be determined on later, is declared to be valid, I will form a company to finance your work for the next ten years."

Again the two women mutely interrogated Dove who still remained staring down at his shabby shoes and working his mouth, as if he had words but could not manage them.

"Father!" Andrea said remindingly and left her place at Mrs. Harvey's side to touch him on the arm.

Isabel, her face sweetly suffused, looked at her husband gratefully.

"I knew you would," she said. "Phil knew it, or he wouldn't have brought us here."

"Father!" Andrea prompted him. "You heard what Mr. Harvey said."

"I heard him," said Dove, and though it was under his breath it must have sounded ungracious to any hearers less determined, for varying reasons, to show him the tenderest consideration. Whatever his attitude might be toward them and all the world beyond his laboratory, his great need was apparent enough to ensure him special privilege.

"Well," said Andrea, hesitating, "oughtn't you to— I'm sure we're so grateful, aren't we father? we're so relieved."

Dove made no direct answer. He only repeated to himself:

"A consensus of opinion of scientific men."

"Can you think of anything better?" asked Harvey. "Isn't that what you'd want yourself?"

But now, to Andrea's unspeakable alarm, her father's face settled into the querulous lines she knew. In the rejuvenation he had been able to compass, at the beginning of the interview, those lines had disappeared and, with

the piteous proneness of the human heart to accept joy as permanent, she had thought them gone for good. And now he was speaking, not to Harvey but to her, in the old complaining key:

"Shouldn't you think there'd be enough faith left in this world to take a man's own word, a man that's worked as I have, that's stripped himself of everything — "

"You don't accept my conditions?" Harvey's voice came in curtly.

"I don't say that," said Dove, still with the inexplicable implication of being driven to the wall. "I don't say I don't accept them."

"If you can suggest anything fairer — " Harvey began, and Dove answered querulously:

"Oh, they're fair enough — from your point of view."

"But, father," Andrea prompted him, "they're all we could ask for, all anybody could ask. They're splendid."

"Well, then," he said, in an angry desperation, "they are splendid. I suppose you know."

"And," she still prompted him shyly but with persistence, she was so desperately afraid of losing what he had his hand on, "you accept them, don't you? Father!"

"Yes," he responded grudgingly, "I accept."

Peter Harvey, little as he expected outspoken gratitude, did look at him in a humorous questioning. Still he did not allow himself to be surprised. These might be the ways of scientific men, queer ducks like artists and fellows of that ilk, specially endowed.

"Then," he said, "I'll scare up my three scientists and fetch them here for the first demonstration. To-morrow?"

"No," cried Dove, in a shrill violence, "not to-morrow."

"Ah!" said Harvey interrogatively, as if delay bred

doubt. "When shall I bring them? if not to-morrow the day after?"

"No, no," said Dove, as if he had a right to fretfulness, he was being tried so far.

"Very well then, in a week?"

But instead of answering Dove turned to Andrea and asked piteously, in the tone of a child who may on the instant break down and sob from sheer tiredness:

"Don't you see I'm all in?"

"Peter!" said Isabel remindingly, and he at once took up his hat to go. He was often bewildered by the outcome of what he considered his commonplace endeavors to make the way plain before some stumbling fellow who couldn't find it. Here he was smoothing the path for this irascible old gentleman who, instead of electing to go on in it, was sitting down by the roadside bewailing the hardships he had undergone in getting thus far. Yet there was something perversely devilish in being "all in." It came when you could least afford it. He'd seen men, knocked out in that way, lose all their chances, too, poor chaps! through not being strong enough to ride the wave when it came. Though maybe the man wasn't so old, after all, not older than Harvey himself. It was a brute of a world, he reflected, when a finely strung creature could be worn to such unserviceable shreds.

"He's been working too hard," Isabel was saying to Andrea, who, bewildered between the necessity of soothing her father and at the same time pressing him to his own advantage, was merely looking piteous and saying nothing.

"Working?" Dove cried in the strident voice of acute self-pity. "Of course I've worked too hard. Did you ever hear of a man's discovering anything and not working himself into his grave?" He swayed a little and

turned again to Andrea as if he were frightened at his own unstable poise. "I'm lightheaded," he muttered. "Things look strange to me."

Isabel was bent on getting away as soon as possible. Nothing, she saw, would compose him but Andrea with whatever arts of soothing her accustomed tasks had taught her. But when they were at the door and Harvey, holding it open for his wife, turned to bow a grave farewell, Dove started forward.

"Don't forget," he cried, "I've accepted."

"Very well," said Harvey. "The offer's open."

"But give me a week," said Dove, in an inexplicable tone of beseeching, "only a week."

"Of course," said Harvey kindly, "you shall have a week."

VII

ANDREA stood at the door watching them while they got into the car and looked back to wave a last good-bye. It was, she gratefully felt, to assure her of their wordless sympathy, to offer a renewed promise that whatever her father would allow them to do, in the only way they could do it, on that she might count. She closed the door and came back to him where he stood clenching his hands and ejaculating a word or two she could not catch. She went up to him and gently touched one of the tense hands.

"Come, dear," she said, "lie down and let me cover you. It's all settled. Don't you know it is?"

"Settled?" he threw at her. "They drive me into a corner and you call it settled."

She had recovered her composure. It was necessary, as necessary as that the nurse's calmness should keep pace with the patient's mounting delirium.

"Never mind," she said. "Let's not argue it now."

"No," he said bitterly, "accept it. Accept anything they offer, and say 'Thank you' to them. But don't tell me to lie down and sleep. What time have I for sleep when I've got to be ready for them in a week from to-day?"

"You were wise," she cajoled him, "to say a week. That gives you time to get a little rested and me to arrange the rooms. We'll carry it off with a high hand. You must have some clothes, dad. I see you, new trousers, not those old shiny legs, new cravat—"

He was not looking at her.

"God in heaven!" he exclaimed, not wildly but conversationally and looking up as if quite sure the God in heaven heard, "what shall I do?"

"You dread it, don't you?" she asked tenderly. "I wish you didn't. It doesn't seem as if you need."

"Who will they be?" Again, though without looking up, this time, he seemed to be interrogating the God in heaven Who alone could sound his mortal misery. "Scientists. Three scientists of standing."

She laughed a little, as if amusedly, but really coaxing him to that plane of hope where the sanity of Harvey's plan had led her, leaving her there secure with that last reassuring wave from the car.

"Yes," she said, "who do you suppose they'll be? Some of those young professors you used to have down at Long Cliff when you talked about iodides and I had to go to bed, you got so dull? Dad, I almost think you made a mistake shutting yourself up years ago and not seeing them any more. Perhaps this will start you off and you'll begin again."

"Begin again!" he repeated, staring at her. "Take a lot of sceptics on board, just when I'm setting out on my big adventure?"

"That's a pretty way to put it," said she, still coaxing him along as you might coax a child into a flowery meadow out of the dusty road where the trials of the way have been too much for him. "Sailing — an adventure, that's what it is. And you're Columbus and Mr. Harvey is Queen Isabella and he's going to sell his jewels to fit you out and presently you'll be calling 'Land ho!' You're the captain, dad. You're the lookout, too; you're the whole show."

"This next week," he said, "don't speak to me, don't

look at me, don't ask me to leave the house. I've got the most damnable problem to work out that ever a man had, and in one week."

"But dearest," said she, wondering, "you're ready for them now. You've only to say 'how d'ye do' to his professors, or whatever they are, and take them in there and let them see the thing work. They'll get the flashes, at least, just as the Harveys did, and hear it click out 'Increase your power.' I trust it to do that. It wouldn't fail us the one day when it could earn all that money for you to go on with. It never'd be so mean as that."

Her father turned to her and regarded her steadily, a look that reassured her as his manner of receiving the Harveys had done, showing him so capable of the self-control he lacked in his desultory intercourse with her that she could believe him to be still a man of strength and power.

"Andrea," said he, as if he were bent on impressing her with the extreme importance of what he had to say, "I've got nothing to show them; nothing, that is, a trained mind would accept."

"But," she said, bewildered, "it said, 'Increase your power.'"

"It said it," he repeated bitterly. "Yes. And who prompted it? who made it rap out the Morse code? I did."

"You did? Then that means you've more control over it than I thought. You can summon them, whoever they are, and make them answer, and because they can't answer fully they say, 'Increase your power.'"

He stood looking at her a full minute, considering. Perhaps he was wondering whether it was not wasteful, one of those terrible traffics where we barter gold for dross, to run the risk of losing her untouched belief in him. But she was only an atom, as he was himself com-

pared with the colossal good he meant to bring about. And at this stage she could help him more by acting with him, her eyes open, than by following blindly on, armed only with her unsupported confidence. That he might lose her, he never for a moment guessed.

"Andrea," he said, "when I tell you I did it, I mean I did it by a trick, a trick a mere student of the a b c's of physics would detect at once."

"A trick?" she repeated, only puzzled, as yet. It must be, she thought, some eccentricity of what he was pleased to call his mechanical toy.

"A trick," he said. "Nobody has called me from any mysterious source. Nobody has asked me to increase my power. But—" and now his gravity of composure disappeared. The light she knew and dreaded had come back into his eyes—"but it remains just as much a fact that that's what I've got to do. I've got to increase my power. And what difference does it make whether I tell a literal, hard-headed fellow like Harvey that I know it's so, or whether I convince him by a harmless demonstration?"

"But, father," said Andrea, struggling with her dismay and a growing terror of his mental processes, "you wouldn't deceive those two."

"Wouldn't I?" said he grimly. "There isn't the man or woman living I wouldn't deceive to bring me an inch nearer my result. I don't know whether there's a man or woman I wouldn't kill."

And, blankly thrown back upon her unprepared self, all that occurred to her to say, was:

"Daddy, won't you lie down?"

Then ensued one of the strangest interviews she had ever had with him. Up to this time she had known him as children know their elders, without analysing, without question. It had been the inherited partnership of love

But now, of fixed purpose, he set out to translate himself to her, to impress on her mind his real image because the moment had come when only so, he believed, could she serve his tremendous project. He sat down and pointed to her chair and she was glad to take it.

"Andrea," said he, with that unchanged air of holding her to an intent consideration of the fact before them, "did you ever think what it is to be a scientist?"

"A scientist?" she repeated wearily.

She was disinclined to enter upon abstract explications. It seemed to her he might give her a few sane facts to feed on and prevent her life from being so unpalatably queer as it was, so unlike the lives of other daughters who had not incurred the fate of genius in a father. This was the first time she had retreated from him far enough to conceive their interests as separate and perhaps conflicting. Up to this time she had not allowed herself to recognise any just desires of her own; but the moment of facing Philip Harvey's picture had awakened in her a bitterness of revolt that she, so young, had been called upon to suffer such unformulated griefs. If she had known the Harveys before their son died, known them as his father and mother, so that she could have had some friendly intercourse with them, a staff for her grief to lean upon, then there would have been something natural and bearable in it all. But he had come to her from the skies, he had been withdrawn into the skies again, and the familiar places that had known him on earth were closed to her. And all this had stung her into a madness of revolt. For the first time she felt her youth had had its rights and chance denied them to her. But she repeated her father's word and, scarcely waiting for it, he went on in his argument, desperately calculated, she saw, from point to point, to move her.

"Yes, a scientist. Being a scientist is fighting your way through every difficulty to the closed door."

"The closed door," she repeated, again wearily.

"That's what science does. She lets you open one door after another; but you have to reach the door with such struggling, and you're so weakened by the long way, by hunger, by thirst! Andrea, think of the men that have opened doors, and how they suffered, most of them, and nobody believed and nobody cared. But they never stopped for an instant trying to reach the one door they were making for, to drag it open, so that others could go through — even over the dead body of the one that opened it — out into the light."

Still he was not moving her from her trance of self-pity and he saw it and called on himself the more mightily, with a louder voice. She did speak, but faintly and with only a sad interest in what he said:

"Poor little father!"

"You don't see it yet," he insisted, "that picture of the door that'll stay closed till somebody offers up himself to open it. That's where I've got, Andrea, don't you see? Right up to the door, and now, when my strength is gone from fighting my way along, comes the hardest task of all. I've got to fling myself at the door. I've got to batter it down."

"Well, dear," she answered, "that's what I say. You've made the long journey. We've made it together. I've been there, too. I haven't left you for a minute." Her mouth quivered, as if she wished he might remember this again without her prompting. "And now," she said, calling on her old cheerfulness, "Mr. Harvey is going to help you batter down the door."

"Is he?" said Dove ironically. "Yes, I suppose he is. He's going to work by these modern methods on a gi-

gantic scale — everything in terms of horsepower — and fetch an armored tank and ram at the door and burst it through. But I've got to stand with an electric torch in front of it, to show the way. And the tank is going to be full of his damned professors, and if I don't hold the torch to suit 'em they'll run me down."

"Father," said Andrea, "I don't understand you."

"You'll understand me soon enough," he said drily. "Harvey wants proof. Well, I've given him proof up to his capacity for understanding it."

"You mean you showed him something you expected him to take for truth."

"In a way, yes. An illustration it was, an illustration. If I could satisfy him to the point where he'd finance me, I could keep on in the line where I'm working and that would take me, not to any illustration, mind you, but — since we've talked of the door, — to the open door."

"It's a long way, little father," she said, with a wistful tenderness. He had won her. She was not thinking of herself now but altogether of him. "It's full of briers."

"I did trick him," he said, in a bitterness of retrospect. "I turned out of my path for a minute, only a minute, and took a short cut to satisfy a fool. Do you blame me for taking a short cut when it was going to set me a million miles further on? And now I'm back in the same old path again, where the briers are, you said; and I'm farther back than I was before, and the briers have grown. My God! they've grown."

"You mean," said Andrea, puzzling him out, with difficulty dragging after his wild lead, "that you deceived him to persuade him into giving you the money and that now he wants to put you to the proof and you can't — " she stopped.

If she said it, she was childishly afraid she might make it so.

"Precisely," said he. "I can't make good."

"Father," said she, in a passion of revolt, "I can't believe it. I can't believe — "

There she stopped, but his mind went on, supplying the suppressed conclusion.

"You couldn't," he translated, "have believed I'd sell myself to the devil. Well, I would — for a ticket to paradise."

He was morally indifferent to the values they both had in mind, tossing them lightly off as negligible, reckless as youth, and she loved him suddenly with a heart beating in new understanding of his arrogance. He was not pathetic to her; he was picturesque.

"But," she ventured to object, "that's not science."

"What's not science?"

"What you've done, taking your short cut. Science — you've said it yourself — is truth, the only truth there is."

"There's more than one road to truth." And then, his mind, in the intensity of its working, waking to imagery: "When you've got to truth herself, you can shine up your shield till she sees her face in it; but while you're fighting your way to her it gets as battered as an old moon."

Andrea's head was strained and dazed by these verbal complexities, and she took refuge in fact.

"Well," she said, "we can't see them again."

"See whom?"

"The Harveys."

"Why not?"

"If we've cheated them — " It was impossible to regard herself except as part of him.

"Good God!" he cried exasperated, "I'm not going to keep on cheating them. What good would that do me,

with his scientists coming to paw me over? He's as sharp as lightning — "

"You said he was a fool," she put in irrepressibly.

Already she loved the Harveys.

"Then," said he, "I lied. He's a fool in a laboratory, but that's only because he's had no training. I tell you the man's bright as lightning. I've got to make good, and I've got to do it in this one week. I've shown him the flashes. I've faked a message. I've got to get that message by some legitimate means that will satisfy his three spies."

"How can you?" she wondered.

"How can I? If you're drowning, you swim. You don't say, 'How can I?' If a man hits out at you, you strike first. You can because you must. I've got to satisfy his conditions and, by God! I will."

"Father," said she, entirely bewildered now in her search for the tortuous line between what she might and might not believe, "isn't any of it true?"

"Any of it?" he repeated, staring at her.

"Yes. Haven't you really discovered olympium?"

He gave a cry, an inarticulate sound, stronger than she could have imagined coming from his shrunk throat.

"Of course I have discovered olympium," he panted. "It is a fact, as much a fact as radium. And it has mysterious reactions, mysterious, I tell you. There's no way to account for them, no way but one. They come from outside our atmosphere. They are the work of other intelligences trying to make themselves known. I'd stake my life on it."

Heretofore she had accepted every statement he made her in its simplest, most obvious form. If he told her what he believed to be true, she assumed it was true. Now, though in a painfully ignorant fashion, she had begun to

weigh and balance. And not this evidence alone: the mere human quality of it hurtled at her, hit her with a tremendous impact and left her trembling before life itself and its shifting values. Up to the day when she had come on the picture of Philip Harvey in the library, she had thought as a child. Facts were facts, always comprehensible if you chose to prove them. You might look at them from one angle or you might measure them on all sides to see how, in this strange fluid medium called life, they were made to fit the truth that is more than fact. But always they did fit. And now the sense of life itself, that obscure, multi-colored complexity, was upon her, and she had an overpowering desire to understand her father, to see how the facts he had distorted fitted the truth within him.

"Father," said she, "it's true, isn't it, there's nothing on this earth you want so much as to establish communication between this world and — another?"

He answered gravely.

"Yes. I'd give everything I have, if I had anything left to give. I'd give my life, your life, everybody's life. It's the next link in the chain. We can speak from one continent to another. We're going to speak from one planet to another. And that wireless will be known by my name."

The subterfuge of his short cut was forgotten. She gloried in him. When he said he would sacrifice her, she gloried the more. And it was not alone because he was ready to enter the noble army of martyrs who have laid down their lives for the truth. In the heightened ecstacy of her love for a dead lover, she saw him not only as the martyr pioneer striving for the common good, but himself the constant lover, love itself.

"Father," she ventured, for they had not talked of her

mother for a long time, "do you suppose she knows? Do you think she's trying on the other side of the door to get at you as you are trying to get at her?"

He looked at her in complete wonder and then asked her the astonishing question in one word:

"Who?"

"Why," said she, hardly believing she had heard him, "mother. That's what you're doing it for, of course, to talk to mother. And after all these years."

He sat perfectly still and looked before him. She waited and her heart beat hard. It had begun to be frightened, her heart, it had met so many scarcely comprehended things this day.

"Andrea," said he, at last, "I am not trying to communicate with your mother."

She could not answer. Her throat grew dry and she hated the picture her mind was conjuring up. He was, that cruel insight told her, recalling, and with difficulty, the vision of her mother, sleeping now for years. He began as if he, under the mandate of inexorable truth, were painfully collating evidence. "I suppose," he said, "it was so at first. Yes, I know it was. I felt — as a man does when he loses his wife. I wanted to know. I had to know. But afterward — " he seemed to gain in actual physical presence and towered with the growth of his waxing egotism — "afterward I just wanted to throw the line across. Anybody might answer. It might be your mother, it might be a man or woman that died a thousand years ago. Only I'd got to throw the line."

A woman understands a man when he speaks in terms of her own realities. But when he mounts his horse of endeavor to ride out against the dragons of ignorance and superstition that have kept even her own hearthstone dark, she may understand him or she may not. She

may glory in that wild ride, or even spring up behind and brave the darkness too. But for the instant she feels the lonesomeness of seeing him off upon strange quests, halloing to the silence in a language not by inheritance her own.

VIII

ANDREA, seeing her father as she never had before, a man insanely bent upon his task for no reward beyond the laurels that adorn illustrious names, felt dulled and cold. Through all the years when he had been growing more irascible, more outwardly remote from her, she had felt the inner heart of him beating on in unchanged constancy. Of late, especially since she had met her lover from the skies, she had thriven on the belief that here at her hand was love itself. Other homes might be set to the tune of a sweet daily intercourse, but on her father's hearth lived the consecrated flame: the unflagging devotion of a man to his desire of speaking once more with his dead wife. His present purpose might be greater, his trembling grasp upon the unfading laurels, his desire to assure immortal certainties to a world of men bereft; but it was colder, and before the frigid greatness of it she was shivering. He saw that and felt he had lost her, or at least her old belief in him; and he felt, by contrast, how heartening it had been, that unquestioning belief where he had warmed himself as a man hovers over the fire on the hearth without thought of the faithful hands that built it there. He was himself suddenly bereft. He despaired of her. What argument was here to bind her to him again?

"Wouldn't you," she hesitated, "if they brought a scientific man here, wouldn't you show him what you called your mechanical toy?"

He shook his head.

"But," he qualified, "if they'll give me a chance I can show them something better than a mechanical toy."

"When?" she asked fearfully.

"When!"

He looked back over the years behind him, months of dark discouragement, an hour of unbelievable happiness when mysterious things had happened in this fumbling after the secrets nature was guarding with a cruelty so inexorable that it seemed personal to him alone and he had the dark solace of feeling himself under the ban of the gods. Yet through the obscurity of that time ran a golden thread: his belief that communication was possible, his resolve, stronger than past love or present despair, to find it. And now he broke down in a perfectly honest misery of beseeching. As she thought, in her compassionate mind, he went all to pieces.

"Andrea," said he, "I know it is possible for this earth to communicate with the rest of the universe if there is life enough in the universe to answer us. And I believe there is. Whether it has anything to do with this planet I don't know. But communication will come, and it won't come through half-baked mediums and fakers. It will come exactly like every other advance on this earth, through science. Some slave of his own insight and his own determination will open the door."

She was looking at him reflectively and he turned his eyes away. She was musing over him, he saw, she was reasoning and, like her, he felt himself grow cold. Andrea was telling herself that he had two parallel lines of argument. But did they, at any point, meet? He asserted that interplanetary communication was possible and declared himself the man to establish it. He asserted that he had discovered olympium and that olympium did

inexplicable things. Therefore — and here she balked — the things it did were in the line of his theory of communication. Was he clear-headed there? was this logic, defective to her only because she was unpractised in its art? Once it would have been impossible to set up her poor reason in opposition to his trained intelligence. Now she was hot upon penetrating the maze of probabilities.

"Father," she said, "I don't understand. You say olympium makes the dots and dashes. But you say, when you tried to get the dots and dashes to convince the Harveys, you played a trick."

"I don't always," said he, "get my dots and dashes when I expect them. I had to have them at that particular minute because the Harveys were here and the Harveys wanted them. So I helped them."

"But how?" said she, in despair. "If you don't understand how they come, how could you help them? You said the working of your mechanical toy was outside your control. How could it have been in your control this morning?"

"Simply," said he, "because I didn't do it by the use of my mechanical toy."

And now he looked so sly that she believed him. And the perfidy of that was so sickening upon her that she was about to tell him she repudiated the whole thing both from the Harveys' standpoint and her own, when he faced about mentally and made a last assault upon her loyalty.

"Andrea, you don't understand these things. I tell you something, and you think I'm a fraud. I'm not. I'm only taking one of the short cuts to what I've got to do. You must leave all that right here. You couldn't judge me justly to save your life. You haven't the knowledge. Those Harveys couldn't. They haven't the knowledge either. I've just one thing for you to do."

"What is it, father?" she asked him, as he paused, evidently to whip his arguments into line.

"If I don't make my discovery before I die, you've got to make it for me."

She was greatly startled.

"But, father," she said, "how could I? You say yourself I've not the knowledge, not the training—"

"You don't need them. You may work better from your ignorance. It'll keep you passive. Do you see? If I die—and sometimes I think I sha'n't live long—my heart's not strong—if I die, I shall be at the other end of the line. Wherever they go—spirits—I shall be there. I shall work through you. Don't let your mind wander," he cried peremptorily. "Listen to me. In that room, in the upper right hand drawer of the desk, is a set of directions, very short. They tell you where to find it—olympium, I mean."

"Isn't it in the case?" she asked.

They had taken great precautions to keep it packed when it was not in use, so that in emergency they could lay their hands on it. He looked shrewdly at her, as if he wished to seem inscrutable.

"It is now," he said. "If I made up my mind to take myself off the planet I might put it somewhere else. It's too easy to snatch up the case—anybody coming in here—"

He was wandering off now, and she recalled him.

"But nobody does come when we're not here."

"My directions," he said, waking again to this last imagined crisis, "will tell you what to do. It's a simple formula. You won't understand, but do it. When I die, don't leave me for an instant. Stay in that room there, follow the written directions and wait till I communicate. For I can communicate. I can! I will!"

His voice rose from the level of reasonable speech into the shrill staccato that always terrified her; it meant that he was as she always explained it to herself, "too tired."

"But father," she began, "there must be something for me to learn — "

"Nothing," he cried, in a child's passion, "nothing but the Morse code. You shall learn that to-day. Then all you need to do is to sit down and wait for news from me. I'll write out the message you are to expect and seal it with my seal and lock it up in the top drawer on the left. But they wouldn't believe you," he added, dropping into an apathy of discouragement. "They'd say it was a put-up job."

"We mustn't plan such things," she said, adding that old futility of tenderness, "You're not going to die."

This he did not notice. He had roused again.

"You will take the message," he said. "You will write it down. And you'll send for Peter Harvey. He must have the key of the drawer. Ah, but how are you going to send? " he cried, in great irritation. "After it happens you're not to leave me. He must have the key now. He must have a latch key, too, so you needn't even let him in. Aha! I know. We'll put in a telephone. Then you can summon him. He will let himself in, he'll unlock the drawer and take away the message and yours with it, and he will break the seal in the presence of witnesses."

It occurred to her that, after all, it would come back to her own good faith, since he might be supposed to have told her what the message was. But this she would not say: he was too tired. Instead, she assured him gently:

"Daddy, you're not going to die."

"I don't know," he answered. "It might be the last sacrifice. If I felt sure I should work better from that end of the line — "

Here he paused, and she cried out:

"O father, no! you wouldn't do that. You mustn't even think it."

"What else can I do?" he demanded angrily. "This man puts on me a condition I can't fulfil."

"Can't?" she repeated, with a sinking heart. "You said you must."

"It isn't possible," he declared, again out of deepest gloom. "I must work in my own way or not at all. As for these people, give them up. I've no use for a man who's so infernally particular about seeing where his money goes."

"But," said Andrea, "I don't want to give them up."

She was bringing her own poor little desires into this drama between worlds, simply, she knew, because she ached with loneliness.

"You know," she said, "I told you it was their son who came down and talked with me that day on the way to Long Beach."

"What day?"

He was looking at her in absolute lack of understanding. He had forgotten, and the stab of it stung her to cry out:

"O father, I told you. He is the only one I ever cared about, and he was their son."

"Then tell them so," he threw back at her, "and get something out of them. Get Harvey to say he'll stake me for three months, a year, without driving any sort of Shylock bargain with me."

She was aghast at the effrontery of it.

"But I can't," she said. "I've no claim on them. You talk as if we'd been engaged — and even then I couldn't — or married to him."

"You should have married him," he said, impervious to

possibilities, ignoring them, thrusting them out of the way, and dashing on to his own ends. "Then you could have demanded something of them and they wouldn't have had the face to refuse you."

"Do you mean — " she began, and stopped.

"I mean," said he, "if you were so selfish as to let a rich man's son make love to you and leave you when we're on this awful road, this briery path — you said it yourself — never once telling him he could save us, you'd better sacrifice your pride and save us now yourself. Tell them he was in love with you. He was, wasn't he? Tell them he married you. Tell them anything. Only, for God's sake, get the money, or you'll force me into making my last sacrifice. Yes, as God's my witness, I swear I'll kill myself."

She stood staring at him and he stared back at her and then, enraged at her silence, he went into his room and shut the door.

IX

MADAM BROOKE was by the fire in her daughter's sitting-room, her chair turned at an angle to command the room. Miss Bixby, the noiselessly competent secretary, who came in to gather up some papers from the table, gave her a respectful glance, but brief as it was, it enabled her to snatch a complete volume of enlightenment from the old lady's attitude, her head bent slightly as she addressed herself to the morning paper. Madam Brooke stayed in her own room, Miss Bixby knew, unless the family government was in some sort of agitation, and then she came down and seated herself nearer the centre of things. This discovery had dawned on Miss Bixby only since Philip's death and the wave of automatic writing that had engulfed the house, and she was the more alive to its significance because she herself ruled these psychic waves. The old lady made Miss Bixby uneasy. Her glance, satirical on occasion, pitilessly sharp, threw the wrong light upon the vague outlines Miss Bixby saw growing under her pencil as it sketched another world conformable to the dreams of mourning mortals. Mrs. Harvey, too, felt the power of that glance, Miss Bixby knew, and had sent her now to fetch their ghostly tools to the room below, on the transparent pretext that it was warmer there. The instant she had gone, Madam Brooke confirmed her diagnosis. She let her paper slide to the floor, rose and, with her stiff sprightliness, something like a bird's movement on the ground, went to the table, pushed the electric but-

ton beside it, and had just returned to her chair when Susanne answered it.

"Is Mr. Harvey in the library?" asked Madam Brooke.

Susanne was sure of it. She had just taken him the mail.

"Ask him to come here," said Madam Brooke. "Tell him to read his letters first, if he wants to. I may keep him some time."

It seemed Mr. Harvey did not want to read his letters, for he appeared at once, cast a glance toward the table in the window recess and then came on to Madam Brooke.

"Draw up," said she. "You were afraid Isabel wanted you." She too glanced at the table in the alcove, one eyebrow lifted and a half developed smile. "I'll warrant you're never asked to enter this room now without wondering if it's a message through that woman that'll cost you half your income."

Harvey also smiled, but in a rueful way. Although it was the morning he looked tired, and now he passed his hand over his forehead to mitigate the feeling of the lines there that would never be actually smoothed out.

"Oh," he said, "I'm pretty well prepared for anything that's likely to happen on the score of —" Again, by a glance, he indicated the table, but he didn't like to refer to its uses with the emphasis he felt. They were unholy to him. It was a banal form of meddling, but after all it meant Philip and if he flouted it he seemed to be flouting Philip also. The old lady put out her hand and touched his with one finger.

"Peter," said she, "you ought to turn that Bixby out of the house."

"Well," said he, "what can I do?"

"After all," she remarked, "you're the head of the house. You needn't be afraid of Isabel. She's gentle as a lamb. That is, she is by nature. Isabel's not quite the same since she's taken up planetary communication. Still, I fancy she'd do anything you say."

"But," said he, "she gets some comfort out of it."

"So she would out of a drug," returned the old lady bluntly. "But she'd have to pay for it in the end. And if she wants to drug herself, let her go out of the house to do it, or have in somebody, somebody that's square, if any of them are. She isn't square, Peter, that Bixby isn't. You can tell it by her eye."

"No," he said reflectively, "I shouldn't say she was. But she might be any kind of a crook and yet do a perfectly square stunt of automatic writing."

"Is anybody square," she challenged him, "when they've let themselves loose in all creation?"

"Oh, yes," said he, "I'm perfectly sure of that, dozens and dozens, hundreds even."

"You don't mean to tell me," she countered, "you believe there's anything in it."

"Yes," he said, "I'm inclined to think there may be something."

"Do you believe my husband is writing all that stuff about spheres and meeting Philip and warning you to look out the malicious spirits don't cut in — do you believe that?"

"No," said he, as if it gave him hearty relief to repudiate something, "not for a moment."

"Then, if it isn't spooks, what is it?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"Do you think Bixby may be possessed by some power she doesn't understand, or do you believe she's fraud right through?"

"I should say," he answered, smiling at her because he knew he was about to give her the special pleasure of corroboration, "if I'm to trust the evidence of my senses — that sort of mental nose we have for smelling out the kind of person a person is — I should say the hated Bixby is pretty well tinctured with fraud."

"There!" cried the old lady, in high triumph. "There! and yet you won't get rid of her."

"I won't give Isabel the shock of doing it at present, not till she's a little less broken over Phil. I have an idea Brooke's coming home will make some difference about that, — talking with him, seeing him round the house, you know. It'll occupy her mind more and more, and she'll gradually give up her drug."

"And yet," said the old lady ruthlessly, "she's so taken up with it that she's almost indifferent to Brooke's coming home."

This he knew, and yet he winced under it.

"She may seem so," he said, "but that's partly because she's so determined to have news of Phil to give him when he comes. That takes in both the boys, you see."

She reflected for a moment.

"So," she said, "it seems you do see through Bixby."

"Well, at least I fancy I do. I suppose I could be convinced I'd done her an injustice. But that Miss Dove now, you couldn't convince me I don't understand her."

"What," said the old lady, her belief in his perspicacity scattering, "you don't mean to tell me you distrust Miss Dove?"

"Distrust her? Heavens, no! I believe in her down to the ground. If she told me she'd had a message from my first wife I should swallow it implicitly."

"Why," said Madam Brooke, "you never had a first wife. That is — I mean — "

"Precisely," said he. "But if Miss Dove brought me a message from my first wife I should take it and say 'Thank you.'"

"It's the way her eyebrows act," said Madam Brooke conclusively. "I feel just the same. Don't mention her in the same day with the Bixby woman. That's quite another pair of sleeves. Peter, if you actually caught Bixby at her tricks, would you dismiss her then?"

"I fancy so. Yes, I would. I'd send her packing, on the spot."

"Well," said Madam Brooke, "I've got a plan."

He loved her plans, they seemed to put such energy of youth into her. He had had moments, in these last weeks, of wishing Isabel were growing a little more like her mother, that there was a spark more intellect and fun in her soft adhesiveness.

"I thought it out last night," she said, "when I was saying my prayers."

"Do you say your prayers?" he inquired.

She was so uncompromising that he expected her to demand proof of the heavenly powers before she recognized them.

"Silly!" said she. "Of course I say my prayers. I pray for my dead, too. Not many of you do that, I bet a dollar. Well, last night just as I finished you all up — here, you know, you and Isabel and Brooke and Bee — and got to Philip it came into my head what I could do and I laughed right out. Isabel's door was open and she called: 'Mother, was that you?'"

"I heard her," said Harvey. "You didn't answer."

"Of course I didn't. I was saying my prayers, wasn't I? But this was what I thought. That woman sits in the alcove there by the hour, addressing notes, doing accounts, all sorts of things when she isn't at her automatic

writing. She flits in and out like a shadow. She doesn't like me very well. She knows I'm onto her."

Peter laughed out. It was at the last excellent phrase and she, too, smiled at it.

"Oh, I can't help it," said she. "I got it from the boys. Well, the next time I hear her coming I'll doze in my chair. You'll see her going by the library door, and you run up here, pass her without speaking and you and I'll fall into talk. And I'll tell you a yarn about my brother who died — "

"Your brother," said Peter, "is as hypothetical as my first wife."

"Of course he is. Do you s'pose I'd meddle with the dead? No! but I'll tell you what he used to say to me, and I'll bet Aunt Clarissa's snuff box against your gold pencil that baggage'll write it out as a message within a week."

"Done," said Peter. "She couldn't. It's too childish. She's not more than half dishonest. She may give the pencil the least little push, but she doesn't make up whole histories. I don't believe that of her."

"Very well," said Madam Brooke, "we shall see. You'd better be in the library. Isabel's going out at eleven and she'll send her up here to work at that table. I'll fall asleep in my chair."

Harvey went down to the library smiling at her ancient guile and not greatly interested in the outcome. But it happened as she had foretold. Busy over his papers, he heard a step along the hall, looked up and saw Miss Bixby's trig black figure pass his door. He laid his papers on one side and, still smiling at the persistent gamesomeness of his old friend, went up to his wife's sitting-room. And there again it happened as she had foretold. The window where Miss Bixby sat was not in direct range of

the door, but he was aware of her. Madam Brooke, bent absurdly double, was asleep in her chair. He advanced toward her, stopped at a dozen paces and called her name. She recovered herself with a jerk.

"Stand there," she bade him crisply, "right where you are while I tell my dream. If you come any nearer, you'll make me forget. I was dreaming," she recited, in a voice calculated to carry, "of my brother Samuel, dead long ago. You've heard me speak of him. He was the only one that called me Ellen. 'Ellen,' he used to say, 'if I can come back I will, and I'll remind you of the time we chased the spotted cow to put a wreath of daisies round her horns.' But he never came," she concluded mournfully. "He never came."

Whether Miss Bixby pricked up her ears or not, neither of them knew. Peter Harvey, feeling very much of a fool, duly waited for the conclusion of Madam Brooke's rhapsodising and then advanced and took the languid hand she gave him. She drew him to her and cocked an eye.

"How was that?" she queried. "I hope I've made myself clear."

"You have," said he, "you serpent of old Nile."

She raised her voice and went on improvising. Peter was ashamed of her, he told her in an aside, and ashamed of himself for humoring her, and presently she resumed her natural tone.

"There," she said, "now we'll stop playing the fool. She's gone."

He turned to look. The table was in order, the chair before it empty.

"You've the ears of a cat," said he. "I didn't hear her."

"Hear her!" said she, in her abiding scorn of the un-

ready. Was it necessary, she seemed to ask, to lag so by the way? "Nor I either. I felt her. Don't you suppose I know when such a creature as that comes and goes? It's the pricking of my thumbs."

X

It lacked a day of the week Peter Harvey had given Andrew Dove to prepare for him and his committee of investigation. Again Madam Brooke had settled herself in Isabel's sitting-room. These were troublous times in the house and she hovered more persistently about the probable scene of action. And to-day, as time passed and it began to look unlikely that anything significant would happen, even the usual programme at the table, Isabel came in with the evident purpose of seeking her. Something was on her mind.

"Mother," said she, "who was Samuel?"

Madam Brooke, stiff as a soldier on parade, stared up at her. Some fiery stimulus might have run over her nerves, she looked so incredulous of the words, so moved in her welcome of them, so altogether gay.

"Isabel," said she, "will you oblige me by ringing that bell and calling Peter?"

"What do you want of Peter?" asked his wife. "He doesn't know. At least I suppose he doesn't. It evidently happened a long time ago, before Peter'd even met us. Anybody named Samuel who died, you understand. He called you Ellen."

"Isabel," said Madam Brooke, making an upward move to leave her chair, "will you send for Peter or shall I?"

"I'll call him myself, dear," said Isabel.

She left the room and was back presently with Peter,

to whom she had confided that mother was very much excited.

He found her so, but his eyes told him the excitement was rejuvenating and delightful.

"Now," said Madam Brooke to her daughter, coincident with the little triumphant nod she had given Peter, as if to bid him take note how indubitably she had come out on top, "now Isabel, what was it you had to say?"

"Why," returned Isabel, "it may be nothing you know anything about, only I was interested in it because — well, you know I'm interested. I just asked you, who was Samuel?"

Peter gave a little involuntary sound and Madam Brooke shook her head at him.

"Be quiet, Peter," she adjured him. "Go ahead, Isabel. I know all about Samuel. What have you got to tell me?"

"It's simply queer," said Isabel. She consulted a paper in her hand. "It's very much like nonsense, and I had Miss Bixby write it off so I should be sure to get it right. It's something about a spotted cow."

"Yes," said Madam Brooke, "a spotted cow. What else?"

She would not look at Peter. He was making more sounds and suppressing them with difficulty, so that his wife looked at him now and asked sympathetically:

"Have you taken a cold, dear?"

"The spotted cow," insisted Madam Brooke, tapping impatient fingers on the stand. "What else?"

Isabel consulted her paper.

"You and Samuel," said she, and paused to look up interrogatively "— I don't know who Samuel was — you chased her and tried to put a wreath of daisies round her horns. There! I can't make anything of it, but that's the way it came."

At this point Peter Harvey took a gold pencil from his pocket and laid it in Madam Brooke's extended hand.

"I suppose," said the old lady, in an ecstasy of delight her daughter could not fail to see, "I suppose it came through in the usual way?"

"Yes," said Isabel deprecatingly.

She was a sweet person who, in spite of the late change in her, still shrank from strife. But her mother pursued her catechism, now evoking the hated name.

"Through Miss Bixby?"

"Yes," said Isabel faintly and Harvey was moved, as he always had to be when the tide set against his wife, to save her actual mischance.

"There, Mother Brooke," said he, under his breath, "it's funny. It's tremendously funny, but there!"

"You needn't 'there' me!" said the old lady, abating none of her delight. "You can't stop me by any of your there-ing. Isabel, I sha'n't tell you who Samuel is. Or rather I sha'n't tell you now; but I give you my word this is a perfectly grand message."

"Is it authentic?" asked Isabel, in a fearful delight of her own, incredulous of anything so marvelous as that her mother should consider evidence. "Does it prove anything?"

"It proves a good deal," said the old lady, still in high feather. "Authentic? Well, in a sense it is. You let me think it over, Isabel, and I'll tell you all about it."

The chances were that Harvey, in his compassion for his wife's perplexity, would have put forth some sort of immediate explanation, but at that moment Susanne appeared with the announcement that Miss Dove was below, to see Mr. and Mrs. Harvey.

"Of course," said Isabel at once, diverted to a more

feasible hope. "Ask her to come up." And in the two or three minutes before Andrea appeared they did not, for varying reasons, recur to Samuel again.

When Andrea came in, they were, in their several ways, shocked, almost to the point of outcry, by her look. She was haggard. Her youth had gone, unless indeed what she had kept was the look of youth that has suffered physical mischance. Isabel hurried to meet her and took her hands and Peter, following, found himself uttering "Poor child!" a repetition not intended to be heard, but only for the relieving of his kindly heart. They led her to the fireplace where Madam Brooke, having put her triumph and her pencil by, regarded her with a concern Andrea was grateful for, and brought her a chair so that they formed a little group there before the old lady. The girl's face quivered pathetically as she glanced again at the faces that seemed to promise such kindness of heart. For the first time in the week she had not seen them she began to feel warmth in her veins. She began abruptly.

"It's no use. My father won't do it. He can't."

She stopped there and Harvey prompted her.

"He isn't ready to see me again?"

She shook her head.

"Or," he went on gently but inexorably, for though his heart was softness itself he could not yet abandon the business man's obstinate acumen in dealing with business usages, "he won't let me bring somebody to him — one man even, who knows more about these things than I do, to tell me where we stand, so I can start the ball rolling — if I can."

Again she shook her head.

"He can't," she protested. "He simply can't."

"Well," said Harvey patiently, "now why can't he? what's your opinion? Is it that — " he put it quite cas-

ually not to affront her — "is it that there's nothing there?"

But instead of breaking into the passionate avowal he expected, she looked at him mournfully and said, as if she had repeated the same thing over and over to herself until she was tired of the sound of it:

"I've given up thinking of that. What I'm thinking of now is father himself. I'm afraid something will happen to him. I'm afraid he'll kill himself."

"Peter!" cried Isabel, and he knew what it meant. It stood for a whole page of expostulation and entreaty. If money would save a man from the despair of threatening to end his life, if money would save this girl from the terror of listening to such threats, the money must be forthcoming. But Peter Harvey was not so readily convinced. He did not over-prize his money, but he felt it was an important ministrant of life, and he liked recognised ways of giving it. He meant to add to the world's soundness, not its folly.

"Tell us," he said to Andrea, "precisely what your father says."

She began and told him with a perfect clarity how he had threatened, as a last resort, to quit work at this end of the line he believed to exist between the earth and something outside its atmosphere and, leaving her here, to take himself elsewhere. She told him of the message locked in the drawer of the desk which Peter Harvey alone was to open, and she took from her purse the key of the drawer and a key to the house and gave them to him. Her father, she said, on this day, which had been one of unusual violence of despair, had ordered her to bring the keys and make this explanation, because there was no knowing how soon the keys would be needed, and when that time came she would be at her station in his labor-

atory waiting for the message he was sure to send. Harvey took the keys and sat holding them as if, though he was tempted to repudiate the argument they implied, he could not pain her by refusal. Then, to give her the comfort of at least a temporary acceptance, he got up and dropped them in the table drawer.

"The amount of it is," he began, and then stopped. What he had been about to add was: "The man's dotty."

But Madam Brooke said it for him in another form. She was an exceedingly gentle old lady when actual misery appealed to her.

"Miss Dove," said she, "I'm afraid your father has been working too hard. You find that, I dare say. He's not himself, and it worries you."

Andrea met this with a wholesale assent.

"Oh, he's not at all himself. Or rather he's been like this for a long time, nervous, excitable, not eating or sleeping. Only now it's worse. It's so bad that I don't see — " she hesitated and her pale face became even more haggard — "I don't see," she ended, "how we can go on."

They understood that this covered the terrified belief she could put in no more explicit terms; she did not see how her father could go on without breaking in some tragic way.

"He talks about it all the time," she said. "This week has been especially bad. I get so — well, I do get frightened," she added, with a little smile appealing to them for tolerance of her inadequacy. "You see, I'm afraid he'll do something terrible — to himself."

"Of course you're frightened," said Harvey. "Anybody would be. He must see a doctor. There's not the slightest doubt about that."

"And go away from there," said Isabel, the vision of the desolate room rising up before her. "My dear, why won't you let us — "

"Oh, no, no," said Andrea, terrified now from another angle of circumstance. It was appalling to her that strange hands should perhaps constrain him, unfamiliar voices, however kind, counsel him in conventional ways of getting well. "He wouldn't live a minute, if you took him away from his work."

"Well," said Harvey, "then try to make him ease up. If he's under a strain getting any sort of demonstration ready for the test I proposed to him, tell him that's off. I sha'n't think of it again and he mustn't. When he's good and ready he can call on me again."

Andrea's courage, the small wave of it she was conscious of that morning, receded and left her breathless on the sandy beach of her despair. She had the distraught feeling of the expert who knows every wheel and bolt and nut of a racked mechanism and sees ignorant hands about to meddle with it, whereas if the hands would only lend her the tools and guarantee her silence and leisure, she could put it in order herself. She had gone a long distance since she had seen them last. Now her one thought was money, the angelic ministrant which, though it might not advance her father on his distracted way, would at least save his poor mind. And before she knew it she was entreating them.

"Oh," she said, "you wouldn't say these things, if you knew. You'd do things. You'd do the only thing that would save him."

Harvey was about to assure her he would do whatever she counselled, in her emergency, for the case had passed far beyond any consideration of supernatural agencies; but the flood of her desperation was unloosed and she went on, not heeding.

"You don't know," she was proclaiming excitedly, "you don't know. I am your son's —" here her father's

reproach came upon her like a whirlwind and blew her into that no man's land where the lie reigns in a sinister kingdom of its own — and she concluded, "I am your son's wife."

And, having said it, she was calm. She had made her wild leap into the chaos of that country and her love and her despair combined into a tenacity of purpose to hold her place there. The effect of her declaration was not startling at all. The words were followed by a complete silence, except for a slight rustle when Madam Brooke turned in her chair to face them more exactly. Andrea looked from one to the other and they were, she saw, compassionate.

"You don't believe me," she cried, undaunted now in the fury of the warfare she was waging for her father's easement. "I knew your son. I married him. And for his sake — for his sake — "

Her voice sounded strangely in her ears and she rose and grasped the chair back to sustain herself. Suddenly, by a sheer effort of will, she knew she had got hold of herself, and at the same moment she saw, with a wild triumph, that she had got hold of them. They might not believe her, but they did see that something of a grave import was in her words and must be met. And giving herself no time for reaction to the ordinary intercourse of life, she poured out her story, not as she had told it to her father but in a swift eloquence that never halted for a word. And when she paused, Madam Brooke spoke in a curt commentary:

"Just like him."

"Just like him, mother?" Isabel found voice to say. "Just like Philip to make a secret marriage and say nothing about it — to me?"

Even at that moment, Peter, with his mind bent on

Andrea's testimony, had time for a little rueful commentary that the mother in her took no cognisance of any allegiance save to her.

"You say," he began, addressing Andrea, "you met by chance."

"Yes," she answered steadily. "There was something the matter with his plane and he came down in the field where I was walking."

"That was the first time?"

"Yes."

"How many times did you see him in all?"

"Six."

She was answering concisely, for she had leaped at that first lesson of the liar, that plausibility is chiefly a matter of quick wit. And suddenly she trusted her wits implicitly.

"On which occasion," he asked, "were you married?"

"The last."

"You had a license, of course?"

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"He gave it to me to keep."

"Yes, but where is it, my husband asked you," Isabel echoed sharply.

"It was burned," said Andrea, "when my father's house was burned."

"I am lost," she was telling herself inwardly, without any particular sorrow for it. "Probably I was lost from the beginning or I couldn't say these things. I couldn't think of them."

"Did you go with him to get the license?" Harvey was asking.

"No."

"I have an idea it's necessary."

"I believe it was necessary. But he — arranged it."

"Yes," muttered Madam Brooke. "He could arrange it if anybody could."

"Were you married in a church?" Peter continued.

"No."

"Where then?"

"In a field."

"Just like him," nodded Madam Brooke. "I could believe it of him."

"Who married you?"

"A minister who afterward went to France."

"What was his name?"

"Barry."

"She could have seen that in the newspapers," said Isabel.

Her tone had chilled to ice.

"What became of him?" asked Peter, laying a hand on his wife's arm.

"He was killed."

"She could have learned that from the newspapers," said Isabel stonily.

"What was the date of your marriage?" asked Peter.

She was ready for that also. Time had meant little to her of late, her days slipped so monotonously by; but one date, the day she saw her lover, was burnt into her by many fires.

"August tenth," she answered, "1917."

"The day before he sailed," said Isabel. "Two months before he was killed."

"Why do you suppose," Harvey was asking her gravely, "Philip didn't speak of this to us?"

"You didn't know me," she said readily.

"Why hadn't he made you known to us?"

"There wasn't time. There was no time for anything then."

"Why shouldn't he have written us," said Harvey, gravely persuasive now, as if he begged her also to weigh these problems with him. "Do you think he didn't consider the possibility of not coming back? Why didn't he write me and ask me to look out for the girl he — "

There he stopped. In his heart, so implicit was his faith, he did believe her, but he hated the disorderly method of it all. He wished his son had played the man.

"He thought," said Andrea, "he would come back."

"Did your father know him? "

"No."

"In those six times of his coming you didn't take him to your house to see your father? "

"No."

"Why not? "

"My father," said Andrea, trembling now, for she felt she was being carried with an alarming rapidity out to a rougher sea, "was worried about his own affairs. I couldn't have told him a thing like that. It would have been cruel."

"Why? "

"He would have thought I had another interest. He'd have thought he'd lose me. Why, I've kept my father alive. When he's worked eighteen hours at a stretch, I've kept him going by just holding him up in my hands. You don't know what my father is to me."

"You speak of him," said Isabel bitterly, "with more affection than you seem to feel toward my son."

"You don't want me to speak to you of your son," said Andrea. What little light remained in her face faded out and left it gray. "Besides, I must conquer that. I must stop thinking of him or — " Here she paused and got hold of herself by an effort. "But my father is alive."

"What do you want of us? " asked Isabel, in a voice

keyed to such a strident pitch that her husband, in a warning undertone, spoke her name. But she continued, "Money?"

"Yes," said Andrea desperately. "You said," she continued, turning to Harvey, "it was strange your son had not provided for me—"

"Philip," he corrected her. "Why don't you say Philip?"

She bowed slightly in sign of accepting the correction, and continued:

"I don't ask you to provide for me. I couldn't take it if you offered it. But I ask you, because your son—"

"Philip," he insisted, watching her.

And then she did cry out, as if she were beside herself:

"Why do you want to drive me crazy?"

"I don't," he said. "Go on. Say what you were going to say."

"I ask you, because your son married me, to give my father the money you would be willing to give me."

"It's only another way of putting it," said Isabel.

"I have made your father," said Harvey, "a fair offer."

"Yes," she said, "to bring in three men, cut and dried professors, wet blankets—"

"They won't put out the fire if the fire's there," said Harvey quietly. "But we needn't discuss that. Assuredly I'll provide for you, at least while we're learning more about all this."

It had been too incredibly easy. The surprise of it swept her off her feet. The pity of it did not strike her then that it was out of the man's great goodness of heart she had been able to persuade him. But before she could, in her new craft, determine what words it would be wise to use in gratitude or whether she should let herself go in the overwhelming relief she felt, Susanne turned the cur-

rent of their thoughts. She rushed in, herself a-twitter with her news, every canon of the serving maid's trade forgotten.

"He's come," she cried, and kept on saying it. "He's come! he's come!"

"Who's come?" inquired Isabel, profoundly shocked by this reversal of tradition.

"Why," said Madam Brooke composedly, though with a thrill in her voice, "Brooke, of course."

XI

A VOICE had followed Susanne into the room, a man's voice, young, full of excited laughter:

"Susanne, shut up. Is that any way —"

The four people in the room, silenced by the interruption three of them understood at once, turned to the door. Madam Brooke had, at the first syllable, risen and stood erect, exultant in the consciousness that, although this was scarcely less moving than a return from the dead, she was not bowled over by it. And then he was in the room, making for his mother with a couple of strides and Susanne, secure of nobody's notice, indulged herself in an unrestrained cry of laughter and ran out to tell the news below. Andrea, at the sound of the voice, stiffened and stood staring, and when Brooke actually entered the room she collapsed into a chair, saying to nobody in particular:

"I'm dying."

But nobody heard her except Madam Brooke and she paid no attention, reasoning, if her lightning processes could be called reason, that fainting girls must be sacrificed to giving Brooke his adequate welcome. Even then she wasn't sure it would be possible, Isabel was so befuddled by Andrea's staggering disclosure. She could imagine her passing it over to Brooke at once, possibly with marginal notes of the psychic communications she had been reserving for him. But Isabel was sufficiently moved by the presence of her son to satisfy the most exacting standard. Brooke had passed his father with a

clap on the shoulder, a snatch at his hand and a cry of "Dad!" that seemed to imply enough to content Harvey, who responded with something inarticulate. Brooke strode on to his mother, enveloped her in khaki, escaped long enough to give grandmother a kiss on each pink cheek and her smiling lips and then returned to his mother for the renewed hug of an impetuous affection. He was a tall, lithe, brown fellow, with whitest teeth, a determined chin and laughter forever in his eyes, even when he thought he felt most pathetic, though this, too, was in a whimsical, droll way of deprecating such mortal folly. For he, like Philip who was gone, had a wistful sad streak, something like the melancholy of the Celt; and yet the eyes laughed at that also when it came uppermost. He stood there patting his mother's back, murmuring silly things to her and laughing, giving her the outspoken affection she would not do without. It was not that Isabel was a tyrannical woman, at least in obvious ways; but she knew very accurately what expressed measure of fondness would satisfy her, and the men of her family were such good fellows they took scrupulous kind care to give it to her. Andrea opened her eyes and there he was before her, still clasping his mother and wordlessly convincing her she was the only mother in the world, the top notch of motherhood. He was terrible to Andrea in his beauty, the beauty she remembered and the strength she exulted in. At once, in a dull way, without any special wonder at it, she understood how stupid she had been to assume there was one son only. The picture fronting her was, she saw, a resemblance, not the perfect image of the man before her. The likeness was there and it was marvelous, but in that instant she caught the differences that stamped the strongest individuality on each. And now she was terrified. Coming in upon this battle ground

where she had fought her father's battle with a lying tongue, he frightened her, shocked her out of the pale of her base excuses; he was a young St. George, the militant hero come to slay the dragon of her lie. She turned in the chair meaning to rise with her back to him and get out of the room unseen; but suddenly his eyes were upon her and he loosed his mother and cried out:

"How did you come here?"

Andrea sat there trembling and could not tell him. But the others were recalled to the scene he had interrupted and Isabel, her head high in proud possession of this living son, called out so commandingly that he had to listen, and, in spite of his amazement over Andrea, answer her explicit question.

"Brooke, you were with Philip that last day. Did he say anything to you of any woman — any girl — he cared about?"

As she said it, she hated the sound of the words, they were so meagre, so unsuited to her son who was immeasurably exalted now into another state of being. Yet the nobler words she could not use. Love — how could she pronounce it as between her dead son and this girl who had testified to incredible things? And if they could be proven they were the more distasteful to her.

"Why, yes," said Brooke, his eyes upon Andrea in wonder and delight. "He sent her a message. I can't tell you, of course. I'll wait and tell her."

Then he left his mother, advanced to Andrea and held out his hand.

"I didn't expect," he said, "to see you — yet."

There was multi-colored feeling in his voice. Isabel gazed at him jealously. Madam Brooke, too, was looking on with a sympathetic quickening of the heart. The words were nothing. The tone was eloquence itself.

They had never heard his young voice in such a harmony of sweet appeal. To Andrea it brought only pain. She did not take the offered hand. She rose, retreating from him.

"I must go," she said, her face turned from him to his father and then to Madam Brooke. "My father —"

"Not at once," said Harvey kindly and yet inflexibly. "Brooke, this lady, Miss Dove — that is, we met her as Miss Dove — she tells us she and your brother were married just before he went away."

Brooke stared at her. He seemed bereft of speech. His mother, watching him, gave a little sound of approving satisfaction. He was taking, it meant, exactly the attitude she had been obliged to take. It might not be that he disbelieved in Andrea's strange announcement. But at least he was stunned to the point of being unable to express himself in any manner whatsoever. Then he smiled, in a pathetic way, and did speak.

"Why," he said, "that's —" and he ended impetuously, "I never heard of such a thing."

"No," said his mother triumphantly. It seemed to her they had advanced a step now that he had come home and taken, at the outset, the right attitude. "I think we are able to say none of us ever heard of such a thing."

Harvey's warning hand was on her arm.

"No," he said, with his equable courtesy, "naturally we hadn't heard of it. The marriage was said —" and then Andrea's white face so appealed to him in the one glance he cast her that he qualified desperately, "The marriage took place secretly."

"But," said Brooke, meaning to say nothing and yet entangled by these threads of supposition that seemed to be the ravelling of the web of life, "I should think Phil — why," he added, as if he thought Phil himself might

get him somewhere," Phil sent his fob back, one he picked up in Paris and left there with his other things while he was flying. We were there in Paris the day before — " he stopped and looked at his mother as if wondering what she could bear, and his father put in quietly, with that persistency of his in crowding out fictional values by the stark old terms:

" The day before he was killed."

" Yes," said Brooke, obviously relieved. " We looked the things over, not more than half a dozen, and Phil twisted up the fob in a bit of paper, and he said ' It's for her.' "

" Well? " said Harvey, gently suggesting.

" Why, yes," said Brooke, confused. " That's it. Of course," he said, turning to Andrea, " it's for you. But I thought — " he laughed uneasily and with the bitterness of the man to whom such issues should, in common kindness, have been made clear. " Yes," he added, " of course it's for you."

" But Phil didn't say it was for her," announced his mother, in a clear demanding tone.

Harvey, his brows bent in distress, thought that, for the first time in his knowledge of her, she sounded cruel.

" No," Brooke owned, confused, " that is, not in those words. He said just what I've told you, — ' It's for her.' "

" And you thought — " said his mother.

" No, no," put in Harvey, " don't go so fast. No matter what he thought."

" He might," she continued obstinately, " have thought it was intended for me."

Brooke shook his head ruefully. He was sorry for her.

" No," he persisted, " for he said something besides. He said: ' Isn't there a girl anywhere I can take something back to, for you? ' "

"He thought — " began Harvey.

"Why, yes," said Brooke, "we both had an impression something was going to happen. Naturally we didn't know which one of us it would be; but I felt it and I know he did. So we — well, we talked things over."

"But," said his father, "did he assume you'd know what he meant when he said what he did?"

"Evidently," said Brooke.

He was frowning over the puzzle of it.

Suddenly Harvey turned to Andrea where she sat now, stark and white, her hopeless gaze bent on the ground.

"You must," he said, "have had letters from Phil."

She did not answer.

"Wouldn't it be possible," said he, in the same smiling courtesy that seemed to promise her gentleness at their hands, "wouldn't it give you satisfaction to let us see two or three of Phil's letters to you? Not that it's necessary," he added, the eyes she lifted to his for an instant were so terrible in their dark anguish. "Only it might — it would," he ended, "undoubtedly bring about a better state of feeling here."

"I've got it," said Brooke, to his father. "He didn't tell me where she was because he knew she'd be here. He must have told her to come. Though why old Phil shouldn't have told me," he added, "why you shouldn't any of you have told me — How long," he asked Andrea, "have you been here?"

And still she said nothing.

"The young lady is not living here," said his mother, again that cruel triumph in her voice. "We saw her for the first time a week ago. She has called this morning in connection with some business she called about then."

Again he was off the track. All these cross currents of supposition were becoming too much for Peter Harvey.

He was occupied in wondering how he could get Andrea out of the house, draw Brooke off by themselves and tell him the uncompleted story, when suddenly Brooke turned again to Andrea and asked her, in a tone so gentle that his mother noted it bitterly:

"Would you mind telling me when this happened? When you were married, I mean?"

Andrea looked at him with lack-lustre eyes, but still she said nothing. This was of no set purpose, but it appeared, in that dull chamber of her brain where memory lived, that she had destroyed her own power of ever speaking again. But his mother was ready.

"She has told us," Isabel informed him, not cruelly now but with a readiness of accuracy. "August ten, 1917."

"Why," said Brooke loudly now, in his bewilderment, "that was the day—" He faced Andrea and spoke imperatively. "Wasn't that the day?"

"Yes," said she heavily, rousing herself from her lethargy enough to reason that this at least was due him: the slight comfort of knowing she had not forgotten their one day.

"Then," called Madam Brooke, finding herself irrationally on the girl's side, "then, Brooke, you did know about the marriage?"

He smiled a miserable little smile.

"No," he said, "I didn't know about the marriage. Only, that day—"

There he paused, and now he did not look at Andrea. At this instant Susanne, the keeper of the gate, appeared, and on her heels, as she had come that other day, Beatrice Hayden, who ran up to Brooke and with so impetuous a welcome that he caught her in his arms and frankly kissed her. She was fresh-cheeked and breathless. She had hurried.

"I said I wouldn't come," she told Isabel, laughing and crying in a breath, "you remember. But I saw him go by in a taxi and I said to myself I'd go home and wait till I was sent for; but I'd no sooner got my things off than I put them on again and ran all the way. O Brooke!"

"And he's brought you something," said Mrs. Harvey, in a clear tone that meant to make itself heard. "Phil sent you something."

"Mother!" said Brooke, and no more.

Beatrice stood perfectly still, a look of incredulous happiness over-spreading her face. Then she turned to him, and spoke with a peculiarly soft gentleness.

"Really, Brooke? may I have it?"

He hesitated.

"Is it a letter?" she asked.

"No," he said, "it isn't a letter. Should you mind, Bee," he hesitated, "if I asked you to wait a bit? I'm not sure —"

There he stopped and she thought she understood. She smiled at him.

"I see," she said. "Your things haven't come. Yes, I can wait, so long as it's not a letter. If it had been a letter, you'd have had to stand and deliver or I can't say what I might have done."

But she could not hide her pleasure. It was a token, it was a message to her who had had none save through the facile hand of Miss Bixby, and those banalities hurt her, in their crudity, beyond her bearing. At once Peter Harvey saw that the scene must be broken up. Andrea must be removed, Brooke himself must be given his exit before any of this dull chaos of unproven disaster fell upon Beatrice and wrought its evil on her as it had done on the rest of them.

"Miss Dove," he said. There was something com-

manding in his tone and she looked up at him with a start. "We'll talk another day. Brooke, take Miss Dove down stairs. Susanne will ring for a taxi. Miss Dove — "

There he paused, for he simply did not know how or in what words to add, "Miss Dove is going home." Andrea rose and, without a glance at any of them, went falteringly to the door. Brooke, straight, splendid and moving with the rhythm of the body in perfect condition, walked after her, Beatrice following him with a gaze that loved and mourned over his look, so like that of Philip who was gone. Brooke opened the door and Andrea passed through and he after her.

As soon as the door had closed, Peter Harvey turned to Isabel.

"We won't talk any more," he said. "Not just now."

"No," said Madam Brooke from her corner, "no, Isabel. Bee will hear all about things in time. Not now."

But Isabel had no strength for talking. Her jealous cruelty had ebbed, and she sank into a chair and began to cry. No wonder, Beatrice thought. Would not any mother find her joy over the son who had returned shot through with grief over the other who had gone? She looked at Madam Brooke for orders. The old lady pointed a finger at the door, and Bee slipped noiselessly away.

XII

Brooke followed Andrea down the stairs and when she would have gone out to the street indicated, with a gesture, the little reception room at their left. Mechanically she stepped inside, he followed her and closed the door. He stood before her, his whole aspect changed. He was no longer shaken by the impact of unexpected things, but filled with the delight of her as he had been that day together in the fields. More dizzying delight indeed it was, for her pallor, the wistful trouble of her face, had drawn him to her in a passion of loyalty compounded of love and pity. And as if the magnetism of his presence had recalled her from her poor estate of remorse and fear, she, too, grew before his gaze into more than her former loveliness. The blood rushed back into her cheeks and her eyes looked at him adoringly. All the troubled present was swept away by the one thought that he was dead and now he was alive. As their eyes found each other and were drowned, each in the other's mystic beauty, so hands and lips met. He held out his arms to her, and with a little sound of delight she went to them, and they stood reunited. Neither thought for an instant of what should keep them apart. The recognition of that overwhelming beauty, each of the other, which is love, drugged and solaced them. He was the first to remember.

"It isn't possible," he said, and she laughed.

She thought he was remembering it wasn't possible he had come back and had her there in his arms. He put

her away from him and held her, one taut hand on her shoulder.

"What did they mean?" he asked her. "About Phil, you know. Are we all crazy together?"

Then, as if to confirm the cruelty of her answer, he saw the change in her, responsive. He was a fanciful boy, and there flashed into his mind a story he had heard of a woman rejuvenated under a spell and, before her lover's eyes, falling back into age again. So Andrea, her Maytime grace, the rose bloom of her loveliness, seemed to crumble and grow gray. Again she was the distraught creature who had sat there in the room upstairs, pelted by questions and impassive under them. His hand closed tighter on her shoulder. He wondered afterward if he shook her slightly.

"Tell me," he said, "whether you'd seen Phil before that day you saw me. Why, you must have seen him over and over," he wondered, "for it was that day you were married." And then a solution came to him, and he caught at it, since he must account somehow for their lover's paradise that day, or cease believing in the earth itself. "Phil and I," he said, in a thin sort of voice he had never heard from his lips before, "Phil and I look alike. We've been taken for each other. You didn't — it couldn't be you took me that day for Phil."

She shook her head. It was impossible not to answer that.

"But you —" he paused an instant, and then all his common sense of honesty rose up into impetuous accusation — "but you liked me. It was like — it was like the world before the flood," he said, trying to find some adequate simile for the idyllic beauty of the day. "You — loved me, Andrea. If Holton hadn't come so quickly after we'd talked all those hours, we should have said it.

I should have told you and asked you who you were and — why, maybe this would have happened then instead of to-day."

By this he meant their sudden sweet rush together and their kiss.

The color came back into her cheeks.

"No," she said, "we shouldn't have said things. We shouldn't have told our names. Because, you see, it was like a dream just as it was. And you said, you know — that was when we saw your friend — you said: 'Wait for me. I'll come back.'"

"But I couldn't," he assured her, and again he took her into his arms. "And I couldn't let you know. That's the disadvantage of playing Garden of Eden."

"I knew," she said. "I knew you'd been sent away. You'd gone to France. You'd gone too quickly to find me."

"It wouldn't have been possible to do such fool things," he said, "in any time but such as this. But I did advertise for you."

"You did?"

"Yes, from over there. In three New York papers. 'Lost, on Long Island, a girl. Property of —' Of course I gave a fictitious name. Paris bankers."

"Did anybody answer?"

"Forty-nine. But not you."

"I was too busy," she said, "to read personals. We read the war news then, you know. Anyhow, I knew what I was to do. I was to wait."

That recalled him. He stepped away from her and with distance between them asked her sternly:

"Wait? And did you wait? In God's name, how did you know Phil?"

At the instant of saying it he heard a little sound with-

out, stepped to the door, threw it open and confronted Miss Bixby. Yet her attitude was unimpeachable. She did not look in the least like a person who had been listening, but a person who was on her way into the room on some legitimate errand.

"Excuse me," she said. "How do you do, Lieutenant Harvey? I left Mrs. Harvey's address book in the desk. I was working here this morning."

She went over to the desk, took a small book from a pigeon hole and returned with it to the door.

"It's good to see you back, Lieutenant Harvey," she announced, and went away through the hall.

And immediately appeared Susanne, as if she came unwillingly. Susanne understood none of these things, but she was with youth and beauty, and, as she mysteriously knew, the moment of these two was over.

"Mrs. Harvey," said she, "asked me to call a taxi. She thought perhaps you hadn't understood."

"Never mind, Susanne," said Brooke. His voice trembled, and again Susanne was sorry for him. "I'll see to the taxi. One minute," he said to Andrea. "I'll tell mother and go with you."

He ran upstairs, and the minute he passed the turn of the landing Andrea stepped out and closed the door after her. She ran a few paces, turned a corner and took a back street, and when Brooke came out, after his glance into the empty reception room, she was gone.

XIII

Not one word was said that night about the happenings of the afternoon. Peter Harvey forbade it, speaking to his household severally and in private. First he went to his wife's room. She was dressing for dinner, and turned from her glass, in her plump prettiness, to greet him with her interrogatory: "Well, dear?" He sat down astride a chair, rested his arms on the back and frowned at her reflectively. She stood there carefully powdering her round neck, with as much absorption, he thought, as if sons did not die and other sons come home to strange domestic turmoil that seemed to leave no footing for long anticipated intercourse. Then it occurred to him that although she did do her powdering with a mechanical nicety, she was really tremendously excited, the inmost mind of her. She was still moved at having got her son back, and something in the lifted poise of her head hinted that she was also exulting over having repulsed Andrea ever so slightly on the ground of her presumptuous folly. She turned to him, feminine in every contour, sweet as motherhood and yet angrily triumphant.

"Well," said she, "what do you think?"

"Isabel," he returned, "I'm not going to talk about it any more to-night. And you're not either. If Brooke asks questions, put him off."

But she was too bent on keeping her own impeccable stand to find anything explicit in his.

"He says," she told him, "when he went downstairs again, she was gone."

"Did he?" answered Peter wearily. "I didn't hear him."

"Well, no," said his wife, reconsidering. "It may not have been Brooke that said it. Now I think, it was Miss Bixby."

"Miss Bixby!" he repeated sharply. He was about to add, "Miss Bixby's got to go. She knows too much about spotted cows." But he refrained. This night of general amnesty was not the time to fight out the question of Miss Bixby. "Isabel," he said, determined to be heard and, though it would be a miracle in that household, to be obeyed exactly, "you're to do as I say. Hear me, old lady?" he added, with a poor attempt at lightness. He was tired to the bone. One didn't have sons come home every day on top of these wearing complications he had been fighting out until it seemed to him life was a psychological tangle with no solid ground to stand on while you tried to unsnarl the thing. "I mean it," he said. "We're not going to talk until to-morrow at least, even if it involves not talking about Phil. We're not up to it, any of us."

"I'm up to it," she returned.

He stared at her pink prettiness. Never had he seen her in what struck him as a trivial temper.

"I want this thing settled," she continued, "and settled now. Do you expect me to believe, if it had been true, even partly true, those who are over there wouldn't have mentioned it through Miss Bixby?"

"Oh," he groaned, "Miss Bixby!"

"Yes," she repeated, "Miss Bixby. She's told me wonderful things. You must remember that."

"You told them to her first," he said ineptly. "Oh no,

no, dear," he added, as he read her face. "Not on purpose — of course not. But you don't realise when you're with that kind of a person, how much you tell."

She was dressed now and standing before him in her shimmering gray. It had been a point of belief with her not to wear black for her son since he was but removed from her a step. She looked so complete and forceful in her delicate perfection that Peter was the more depressed. She made him feel crumpled, not up to the game, and perhaps she saw that, for she remarked with what sounded like the indifference of triumph:

"You'd better dress."

Peter got up, and was making his ignominious way to the door, but nearer the sphere of her soft elegance he stopped and said miserably:

"Old lady, I don't know you. I never — " he hesitated — "I never've seen you just like this."

"You've never seen me fighting to free my son's memory from an unscrupulous woman," she announced, in a tone of such hostility that again he stared and wondered.

"Isabel," said he, "that girl isn't unscrupulous. She may be dotty. I shouldn't wonder if she was. When I've been tempted to imagine what she's been through with that old man down there and his one idea, I'm quite ready to think she's dotty. But — " he recovered himself with a big effort, to call up something strong enough to pit itself against her soft imperturbability, "understand this. We're not going to talk about this to-night. You're not going to have in Miss Bixby to stir up her devil's broth — sicken Brooke the first night the boy's at home. Understand me? I won't have it."

Without looking at her he turned and went to his own room, and there he sat down, because his legs were trembling. This was the first time he had given his Isabel a

command, in all their years together, and it sickened him so that he sat there smiling at himself for a fool. But smile as he might, his legs revolted.

To his own naïve astonishment, Peter Harvey was obeyed. The family met at dinner, and though the air was subdued to the memory of Phil who was in all their minds, not a word was said in reference to the strange happenings of the day. Brooke breathed more and more freely as time went on and he saw an attitude had been taken and was intended to be held. His mind was full of his brother and Andrea, but though he was in a pain of eagerness to penetrate their mystery, it did not seem as if he could bear to talk it over in full conclave. They were too immediate to his heart. Try as he might to adjust himself to the incredible thing that had been waiting to leap on him at the minute of his return, it was impossible to do it, and it was equally impossible to undertake its unravelling in the complexity of the family council. Every time his mother opened her lips to speak, he found himself wincing with apprehension. This was after they had withdrawn to the library, for he had expected respite while the servants were in the room. But Isabel was, Peter realised, with an amused surprise, wifely duty itself. She talked freely about Philip and asked wistful questions, but she did not even refer to Miss Bixby, her medium of communication. And the questions touched only the surface of her son's life in France. There were depths none of them dared penetrate that first night, and Brooke inwardly thanked her for her forbearance. It was near eleven when they separated. Isabel rose first and they were relieved to follow her.

"I'm going to stay down a while," said Peter. "I've got some things to mull over."

That was what he always said when he wanted to shut

himself up, and everybody understood. He was to be let alone.

"I'll come in a minute," said Isabel to her son, "and have a pow wow."

Peter frowned. It hadn't done any good then. Her forbearance had been only a truce. She was going to the boy's chamber and, when she had him defenceless, drown him in the flood of her communications and her ire over the claim of Andrea. But Brooke didn't need saving at this point. He saved himself. He turned on his mother the persuasion of his brown eyes, and before he spoke she was yielding.

"Mother," he said, "I can't. Not to-night. I'm just back."

"Of course he can't," said Madam Brooke. "Isabel, you ought to know better. He's got to get used to being at home. If I'd been through what he has, I should cry over the pincushion. You let him have it out alone."

"That's it, darlin'," said Brooke, turning to her with an eagerness of gratitude that made her press her lips together in a resolve she'd rescue him, even if she and Isabel went down with the domestic ship. "You know, don't you, grannie? Mum knows, too, only she's such a dear —" He made eyes at Isabel again and neutralised the ill effect of calling grandmother darling. "I can't, mum, I can't talk to-night. To-morrow I shall be as fit — you can't think."

Isabel gave him a smiling nod of apparent understanding, kissed him good-night and let him go. They stood in silence while he ran up the stairs and then Peter went to his wife and kissed the top of her head, lightly because the hair, shining silver, was so beautifully waved.

"Good girl!" he said. "That's my darling."

He didn't often call her sweet names of the highest po-

tency, but this was meant to counterbalance that "darling" of Brooke's to grandmother. Madam Brooke knew it and smiled over the slyness of male diplomacy. It is doubtful whether Isabel saw through it. Indeed she was too pleased to let herself question it and went upstairs with her mother, sweetly chatting over everyday things.

The house had been quiet perhaps an hour and Peter was still in his library, sitting at the great table, his legs stretched under it, his eyes on the fire opposite. Twice he had risen to throw on a log, but he always returned to the same quiescence. The things he had withdrawn himself to mull over would remain untouched that night. About a quarter after twelve the latch softly lifted and Brooke peered in. His father gave him a nod and a little welcoming motion of the hand. Brooke came in, shut the door quietly, and Peter rose and threw on a handful of cones. They cast up an impetuous flame; it seemed to be in welcome of the boy. Peter did not go back to his table. He drew an arm-chair nearer the fire and indicated another to his son.

"I rather thought you'd come," he said quietly.

Brooke seated himself and they began to smoke. Peter was not addicted to his pipe, but he made a guess that they might get on better in that kindred relaxation. Brooke's first question did not surprise him. He found he expected it. Even when he sat there alone, he had heard it coming.

"What's the matter with mum?"

The latch of the door lifted for the second time and they turned guiltily. But it was not Isabel. It was grandmother, who shut the door as softly as Brooke had done and advanced composedly. They were on their feet, and Brooke gave her his chair, which would bring her between them, and took another at her side.

"No use," said she, smiling at them with the bravado of the culprit unashamed. "I heard you slipping by my door, you thief of the world! and I knew if I lay there and screwed my eyelids down I should burst, that's all."

Peter gravely passed her the cigars, to indicate acceptance into masculine fellowship, the freedom of the city, as it were, and she understood and gave the box a little rejecting flick.

"Sure you're dressed warm enough?" he asked. "That wrapper thing is quite lacy. What you got on under it?"

"Plenty," said she. "I got up some time ago and put on my undies. I knew that boy would be coming down. I knew you'd need me. How do you expect to find the answers to questions, you poor men things, unless you get an old witch like me to tell you?"

"Here," said Peter contentedly, "put your feet on the fender — how can you wear such foolish slippers, you silly women? — and fire away."

She put her feet on the fender and turned to Brooke, who sat smoking at a mental distance from their affectionate fooling.

"I heard you," she said, "when I came in. You'd just asked a question."

He roused himself.

"A question?" said he. "What d' I ask? Oh, I asked what was the matter with mum."

"What makes you think anything is the matter?" insisted the old lady, keeping her eyes on him.

"Oh," he floundered, "she's so — different."

Madam Brooke nodded.

"Of course she's different," said she. "Your mother isn't living on this earth just now. She thinks she's rented a mansion in the sky, and there she lives with Philip and her father and Aunt Clarissa, asking outrage-

ous questions and getting answers a child couldn't memorise if he found 'em in his Sunday School lesson. They're too chaotic, too sentimental, too everything that won't stand the light of day."

Brooke threw his cigar into the fire and sat staring at her.

"No," she said, "you don't understand. I'd an idea she wrote you a lot about it."

"She wrote she had something to tell me," said Brooke. "Just what do you mean, grannie? You don't mean — well, I knew they were bitten by it in England. I didn't think we'd got it over here."

He couldn't bring himself to face it squarely. He felt too much distaste for it.

"We call it automatic writing," she said. "That Bixby reads her mind and hands her back what she finds there. It's all dressed up, I fancy, in pretty clothes — philosophy, religion, faith, hope and charity, — chiefly faith. There's no limit to the harm those near-intellectuals can do."

"Oh, Bixby's a fraud," said Peter. "I won't say she reads your mother's mind, but she doesn't need to. She's clever as the devil."

"She's not writing about — Phil?" Brooke asked.

Harvey nodded. There was a great deal to be explained to Brooke: his mother's absorption in the son who was lost to her, almost to the dimming of her remembrance of the son who remained, — that should be explained. It had not become imperative in the first flush of joy at Brooke's coming. To-morrow, when things began to settle into their ordinary channels, he was afraid it might.

"You see, old boy," he said, "your mother has been specially anxious to have this ready for you. She wanted

to hand it to you as soon as you got here: that she'd established communication with Phil."

"Communication with Phil?"

He repeated it, not so much awed as repudiating.

"Yes," said grandmother, nodding her head like a confirmatory fate. "Perfectly shocking, isn't it?"

And so shocking did it seem to them that not one of the three remarked the irony of the word. If it were indeed communication with the beloved dead, was it shocking? The task of explanation now passed into Madam Brooke's hands; perhaps she took it into them as being competent.

"That's the matter with your mother, Brooke. She's not herself. She's strung up to a most awful pitch, every last nerve of her. She's tyrannical, she's jealous, she's cross, she's a thousand things she never was before, and it's simply because she's lost her head over this infernal writing."

"Poor mum!" said he, looking into the fire now and trying to fit the outline of this mother to the mother he remembered. "But what," he said, rousing and turning on his father the inquiring glance of his brown eyes, "what do they say?" — and he amended it, still with distaste — "what does she think Phil says?"

"Well," said Peter slowly, meaning to put his wife's intellectual acumen in the best light possible, "there's a good deal about spheres — and planes of being — and the big guns he's seen over there. Shouldn't you say that was it, Mother Brooke?"

She nodded.

"Yes," she said. "And a good many family details thrown in, all of them, so far as I can see, things Bixby could have informed herself of pretty accurately since she's been here."

"But," said Brooke, looking from one to the other as

if he besought their joint testimony, "is there anything in it? Not as to Phil, you know. I couldn't fall to that somehow. But this automatic writing?"

"There's something mighty queer in it," his father owned. "You can't always account for it by fraud. But I don't believe you can account for it by — the other thing." He had a great disinclination to say spirits. He couldn't regard Phil as disembodied with the ease Isabel had found in taking her big leaps. "And," he said, looking across to Madam Brooke, "while I could sit down and cry over their platitudes, I'll be hanged if I think Bixby's an entire fraud."

"How do you account for her?" she demanded. "Remember — "

"Oh, I know," he said, impatient over his own irresolution, "I know all about spotted cows; but I think when you've determined to blaze your way into the other country — the dark continent over there — you just lose your bearings. You throw over the rules you've been living by here, and, if you care enough about proving the thing, you prove it, by hook or by crook. You do what you can honestly, and when you come to the line where that stops you go on doing. And if that means fraud, why fraud looks to you only like one of the roads you've got to take. It's no use talking, Brooke. It's no use, mother. It's wrong, wrong, wrong, this digging into what's been so well hid."

He was at least clarifying his own mind. He was nearer seeing where he actually stood than he had been since the beginning of his wife's credulities.

"Well!" said Brooke, and fell into silence, thinking. "Well," he repeated, rousing himself, "I can't see why we shouldn't have wireless to another world."

"Yes," said Madam Brooke, as if to herself, and only Peter noticed because he too had the same thought. "That's what the old man said."

"I haven't the least doubt it might come," said Brooke, "any hour, any minute. Only, not in this muddling sort of way through Miss Bixby, or 'most any kind of a Miss Bixby. No, dad, I'll believe in a wireless you prove to me, but not this blasted medium business. It turns the world upside down."

"That," said Madam Brooke, in a tone she was determined he should notice, because she had read something not yet explained in his look at Andrea, "that is precisely what the old man said."

"What old man?" he asked indifferently.

"You tell him, Peter," she prompted. "Tell him all about it from the beginning. It had better be to-night. He'll have to know."

So Peter began and told him the story of the man who declared he had discovered olympium, who said he had had mysterious messages and who asked to be financed in order to go on with his researches. Brooke listened with a divided mind. His thoughts had gone off to Andrea, and it was not until his father had finished and Madam Brooke took up the tale that he came alive to the tremendous import it had for him.

"The old man your father is telling you about," said Madam Brooke, intent upon his face, "is the father of the young woman who says she was married to your brother on the tenth of August."

Brooke came upright in his chair. They had dealt him a shock; every muscle in his body responded to it.

"Her father!" he repeated, out of the daze that settled on him when he first entered the house and had never really lifted since. "How do you know? Who told you? But if she came to you — " He lifted his hand to his forehead with a helpless gesture that told them how tired he was with all these strangenesses. Yet Madam Brooke

felt he had got to get in line with the changed pattern of their family life. They couldn't have mercy on him yet. He must be prepared with some measure of preconceived opinion before he fell into the hands of his mother with her determination to push them all into the path of her new certainties. Peter was answering.

"She did come to us," he said, with a musing gravity, as if he were more anxious than anything to be entirely just to her. "She came to borrow money for her father. I offered to go to see him. She agreed. We went, your mother and I, and I offered to stake him — rather generously, I thought — if he'd submit to certain tests. He threw me down, much to her disappointment I judged. And then, in a week, she came back."

"And," said Madam Brooke, "she brought her story of marrying Phil with her."

Brooke turned from one to the other in an appeal they understood.

"Why," said the old lady, knowing perfectly well he meant to ask what they thought of it, "I can't help believing in the girl. It's her eyebrows, I dare say, the way she looks at you. I never saw anything so honest in my life. Besides, it's just like Phil. It would be just like you. You're vagabonds, both of you, without the slightest idea the Garden of Eden was laid out in building lots, with jitneys and plumbing, a million years ago. You'd do it, too, Brooke, you know you would. You'd pick up a girl out of nowhere and marry her any kind of an old way and think if that wasn't the usual style it ought to be."

She was guiltless of insinuation, but the shaft struck. He colored, dark betraying red, and she saw his hands clench on the arms of the chair. "Oho!" thought this knowing old lady, "you've been up to something your-

self. What is it, dear boy? Anyway don't you let your mother know till she's got her temperature down a little after this Andrea business." Now his father was regarding him keenly; a summons, it seemed to be, recalling him from any inward comments he might be making, to give direct testimony.

"Brooke," he said, "did Phil ever speak to you of this girl?"

Brooke could answer that with a perfect candor needing no added tinge of plausibility.

"No, father, never."

"You spoke of a message."

Brooke hesitated a moment before replying. Then he answered slowly, as if weighing his words and in a fashion that made grandmother say "oho" once more to her clever inward self.

"He did send his fob. It was just as I told you. Of course," he added irritably, "it was as I told you." It began to seem to him that he might be tempted to shade some statement in Andrea's favor and that he ought not to be defending himself at the outset before he had to. "He simply said it was for her. Of course I didn't ask who it was he meant."

"You thought you knew," said Peter. "Just as your mother did."

He nodded.

"You thought it was Bee."

"Yes," said Brooke, "I did think it was for Bee. I'd got so used to thinking —" and, not knowing where the sentence would carry him, he ended lamely, "Of course I thought he meant Bee."

"And yet," said his father, with no definite object but evidently hoping that, if they went beating along on a track of question and answer, they should get somewhere,

" yet you were perfectly ready to give it to Andrea Dove. And you refused it to Bee."

" But don't you see," said Brooke, " when you told me — or mum, whichever it was — about her and Phil, why, of course I knew what he must have meant. He meant — well," he added lamely, " he meant the only one he could mean."

" But if you'd never heard of her," pursued Peter inexorably, as much to himself as to his son, " doesn't it seem to you there was something peculiar in his giving you that message without mentioning a name? "

" Of course it's peculiar," said Brooke. " It's all peculiar. It's damnable, any way you take it. But there she was in the room, and you'd told me about her and Phil and she didn't deny it, and of course I knew it was so."

This last was in a tone of such despair that grandmother put out a hand toward him and then drew it back. Let the boy keep the solitude of his unspoken misery.

" You see," she said to Peter, " he has the same impression of the girl you and I have. It may be the eyebrows again; but he's perfectly sure she's telling the truth."

" Why, of course," said Brooke, as if he were outraged at their even stating it, " of course she's telling the truth. What else could she do? "

" And yet," said Peter, pursuing his own reasoning, trying to force his mind into the dull paths of data where it was loath to go, " there were some strange things about it. When she first came, she said it was because your mother had given money to psychical research. When she came to-day she told us she had married Phil. Wouldn't it seem she'd have told us that at first? I don't say there's deception there. Only not quite out in the open, not quite straight."

To grandmother, looking at Brooke, he had turned so sodden with weariness or emotion that she got up and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Bed, dear," she counselled. "You're tired out."

He looked up at her, smiling, but the brown eyes pitiful.

"Yes," he said, "I'm all in. Night, dad. I shall be fit again in the morning."

He got to the door and had his hand on the latch, and suddenly life and eagerness came back into his face.

"Why," he said, "if you've been there, you know where she lives."

"Yes," said his father. "You're right. We'll go round there in the morning."

Brooke opened the door and took his cautious way upstairs. But grandmother, while she waited a discreet moment before following, thought wisely:

"Yes, somebody will go there to-morrow, but it's you, my boy, and you'll take good care to go alone. Now why, dear laddie, why?"

Peter came to her to say good-night, and watch her up the stairs to see she didn't step on her draperies or do any of those disconcerting things the old are supposed, by the somewhat less old, to be perversely liable to.

"Queer world, mother, isn't it?" he whispered.

"Yes, Peter," said she, turning upon him a glance full of that speculative humor which is one of the compensations of long life. "If I let myself try to unriddle the riddle, I could go as crazy as that old Dove."

XIV

ANDREA had gone home, her feet winged. On her entrance, as she had before and from an excitement a million times more acute, she began calling:

"Father! father!"

At once he appeared from the laboratory, with no expectation in his air, only a weary waiting on her will that struck her as sickening in its lassitude. She went up to him and grasping his arm, as if she steadied him to listen, looked up into his face.

"Daddy," she said, "I'm in dreadful trouble. We must go away from here."

"Of course we're in trouble," said he. "Our trouble's the same, those people backing and filling, refusing what they could give me as well as not, and forcing me off this earth. That's what they're doing — crowding me off the earth."

She was shaking with nervous misery. In another moment, she felt, her teeth would begin to chatter and she might go all to pieces in that humiliating crisis of shattered nerves. Her grasp on his arm tightened. She seemed to herself not so much upholding her own body as keeping him, by that reminding pressure, subject to the earth and its clean sanities and in a measure responsive to her will.

"Daddy," she said, "listen to me. We've got to go away."

"You said that before," he reminded her fretfully. "Where could we go? What could we go on? You took

a long time to practise that stenography of yours, but you don't try to find a job. I send you to these people, to get them to finance me, and you only bungle it. You never'll have such a chance again as long as you live. There's the woman as credulous as any born fool. There's the man as soft as putty over her. You got her at the start. Work through her and you've got him."

"But, daddy, I did," she cried, in an agony of abasement. "I worked on them both. I was honest at the start, for I thought I'd only to tell them what you'd done, for them to help us. And when he wanted proof and you wouldn't meet them in that — oh, I know, dear, I know you couldn't — I lied to them, and maybe that would have succeeded; but I can't lie any more, for he's come back."

He stared at her, his brows bent.

"Who has come back?" he asked.

"Father," she reminded him, her grasp tightening on his arm and her face pinched and eager in her desire to recall him from that vague region where he lived with the imaginings of his own mind, what he indubitably knew side by side with what he wanted to believe, "don't you remember I told you about the day I took the long walk to the beach and how the man came down — from heaven," she added the last in the extremity of her passion — "and I thought he was their son who died?"

"No," said he blankly, "I don't remember that."

"But it was so," she cried, with a sharpness of insistence that seemed at last, little by little, to be recalling him. "And because he was dead and you threatened me with your dying, too, and I'd nothing to lose — for with him dead and you dying, what difference did it make about me? — I told my lie. I said I'd been married to him, and begged them to help me."

She stopped, for he was not attending. His eyes had

that inward look she knew so well, when he was pursuing the phantom of scientific guesswork farther and farther into the heart of the universe. The varying look of his face — varying but always tending toward the wildness of downfall and decay — had kept her lately in a state of strained expectation; but now she felt herself arrested, stopped by that inner warder of the mind that guards its sanity. It told her, this unseen guardian, that it would not do for her to get so frightened. She was the keeper not only of her own mind but his. She must not let herself explore these strange purlieus of disordered mental action. She must deal with mortal things as the concourse of mortal minds had, up to this time, decreed mortal things to be. And while she was standing there counselling her wild heart, her remorseful mind, there sounded a knock at the door. Her father at once made as if to escape the pressure of her hand on his arm, preparatory to turning away to his own room; but she held him still.

"Be quiet," she whispered. "Don't move or he'll hear you."

"Who'll hear us?" he asked.

She did not answer, but stood there, one hand on his arm the other at her heart. Brooke Harvey, she thought, had got her address from his father, and he had come, in the wealth of his divine kindness, to take her once more into his arms and tell her the past was still alive.

"Why," said Andrew Dove, in a sudden comprehension, "it's some of those people. Who else is there to come here? Let them in. If you won't, I will."

He broke away from her and made a step toward the door, but she slipped before him in the desperate resolve that only she must meet Brooke Harvey. She would tell him to go away, and forbid him ever to come there again. Just as the knocker fell in a second double rap, she opened

the door and faced, not Brooke Harvey but a trim figure in black. Andrea involuntarily fell back a step and Miss Bixby took advantage of the interval to put her foot over the sill.

"May I see your father, Miss Dove?" she asked, in the most commonplace manner, and Andrea shut the door behind her and followed her in.

Andrew Dove stood there, his head erect, listening. When Miss Bixby walked up to him, he regarded her with palpable disappointment, turned and took a pace toward the laboratory. But she stepped in front of him. Her manner was as contained as her appearance and her voice.

"Mr. Dove," said she, "I've a proposition to make to you."

He looked at Andrea inquiringly, and she explained:

"This is Mrs. Harvey's secretary."

"Bixby," said the lady. "My name is Bixby."

At Andrea's mention of the Harveys, interest reawakened in him. He looked, Andrea thought, almost as he had when he met the Harveys themselves. He was curt in his excitement.

"Well," said he, "what is it? You've a message for me?"

"Not exactly," she said, holding him by the temporising concession, not for a moment risking his interest through denial. "Pardon me, Miss Dove, but it's rather a long story."

This to Andrea, who had recovered her own composure, was a tentative request to be allowed a sympathetic scene for what she had come to say. Andrea set a chair for her.

"Miss Bixby wants to say something to you, father," she told him. It was as if she warned him that she had had enough of these problematic scenes touching the Har-

veys, and that he must stay and take his share of this, whatever it might prove. "Sit down, please, Miss Bixby. Father and I have a way of dropping down here at the table."

Miss Bixby sat, and Andrea also, but Dove remained standing, holding his chin meditatively, his eyes upon Miss Bixby. She began in a perfectly commonplace manner.

"I know all about you, Mr. Dove. As your daughter told you, I am Mrs. Harvey's secretary, and you do, you know — I mean, you do get to know things that happen in the families where you're secretary. Besides, Mrs. Harvey runs on. She never conceals anything, and she never's had anything to conceal."

There was no implied censure in this. It was offered quite impersonally. She did not seem to be giving away her employer with any intent: only stating the indubitable fact.

"I've been doing automatic writing for her," she continued, and, turning to Andrea she remarked interrogatively, "Perhaps you know?"

It had been mentioned; but Andrea thought all Miss Bixby might be entitled to was an acquiescent silence, and the secretary went on, now to Mr. Dove.

"I know about your discovery. I know what you want to do. You want to establish communication with another world. I've heard them talking. You do, you know. In fact, Mrs. Harvey's told me every last word. Now you won't get any money out of them. Never in the world. The son's come home, and just as sure as you live he and his father'll stand in together and make up their minds it's all bad for Mrs. Harvey, and they'll ditch it somehow. You won't get a thing."

Andrew Dove turned his perplexed glance on Andrea.

"You said," he began, "the son was dead."

"That's only a part of the story," she reminded him. "Listen to Miss Bixby now. You shall have mine another time."

But could he? her sick heart asked her. Could his poor mind be expected to assort the parti-colored bits of her life and arrange them in the mosaic of credibility she herself almost doubted? She had a question of her own to ask.

"Is it," she said, turning to Miss Bixby, "bad for Mrs. Harvey?"

"Oh, unquestionably," said the secretary promptly. "Bad as it can be."

"Then why," asked Andrea, feeling, as she had before, a warm championship of the Harveys, "why are you doing it?"

Miss Bixby stared at her in a frank surprise, as if she wondered how anybody could be so little of a psychical mathematician as to refuse to put two and two together and use the four they made.

"Why," she said, "if you're working for anybody, you do, you know. You have to. How long do you think I'd have kept my jobs if I hadn't got inside and found out what they're thinking and what they want me to help 'em think? That's what you're there for, you know. The letters and the accounts — they're only the smallest part of it. Only you mustn't go too far. I lost three jobs — nice jobs they were — because I went too far. I knew too much. They couldn't put on any side. But I suppose they only thought it was I that got too fresh."

The last sounded so frank and was, indeed, so devoid of "side" that it seemed to lubricate her for the moment, and make her less a complete Miss Bixby of black and white surfaces and neat considered movements as a mor-

tal subject to the variability of mortal minds. But she recovered herself immediately and dropped again into her concise, evidently preconceived form of statement.

"Now," she said, turning to Mr. Dove, "my time is short there, just as yours is." And as he merely regarded her with a puzzled wistfulness verging on displeasure, she answered the question he might presumably have put. "And for the same reason. While Mrs. Harvey can lay her hands on me, she's going to make me do my automatic writing; and they've decided, the rest of them, that it's bad for Mrs. Harvey."

Then, caught by a phrase, he did put a question.

"I suppose," he said, "you're what they call a medium."

"No, sir," said she emphatically, "not on your life. I'm a stenographer; but if I couldn't do automatic writing — well, I should smile."

She was fixing his attention more and more.

"Then," said he, "you are a fraud."

"No, sir," she said again, and evidently in a perfect sincerity. "I'm as honest as you are. Why, Mr. Dove, if you think there's nothing in automatic writing you're 'way off. It's easy to do it, easy as pie. But how I do it, I know no more than — the dead."

Her voice sank a little here and Andrea had a sense that, although the dead were part of her trade outfit, she still felt scrupulous about invoking them.

"Do you mean," asked Mr. Dove, in a tone of loud solemnity that startled Andrea, as indicating he took the woman and her work with undue seriousness, "do you mean you never resort to fraud?"

"Of course I resort to fraud," said Miss Bixby patiently. "You do, you know. You have to. Why, if Mrs. Harvey said something that I could put into my next

message and get her into a good frame of mind, you know, shouldn't I do it? Of course I should. It's like using a bridge when you want to cross a stream. It's all mixed in together, what I've heard 'em say, what I know about the family and the rest that I can't account for. But use what you've got, use everything, I say. Just to get to going. Why, I'll warrant you would yourself, when you're making some of your experiments. If you wanted a light to see something by, and your electricity gave out, you'd throw in anything you'd got to make a blaze, like that old potter we used to read about in school that burnt up everything he had to fire his clay. You do, you know."

Dove groaned, and broke out in a phrasing that was half ridiculous and half terrifying to Andrea, it sounded so Biblical and at the same time like stilted novels and the play.

"Woman, why do you come here to me?"

Perhaps it was queer to Miss Bixby also to be addressed by her generic name, for her tight mouth did relax a little.

"That's it," said she. "Why do I? Now you listen, both of you, and I'll tell you." She glanced from one to the other and saw they were indeed waiting on her words. "You," she said to Mr. Dove, "are entirely original. Haven't I heard it over and over again since the Harveys came here, how you'd discovered something new to science and how you were perfectly sure you're on the road to a wireless, we'll call it, between heaven and earth? Mr. Harvey took to it, as I understand, from the first. He says the other things are half baked, trances and automatic writing and the whole show that depends on any sort of medium. Even the old lady, Madam Brooke, says it'll come your way, if it comes at all, and her head's as hard as a nut. Harder, for a nut you can crack, and I don't

believe you could make a dent in her if you took a pile driver."

"Then why," said Dove, his face distorted in a passion of eagerness, "if they believe, won't they help me?"

"Because you won't play their way," she said quietly. "I understand why. You won't because you can't. There's just enough fraud in what you're doing, as there is in what I am, so you can't come out in the open and offer to give yourself up to the third degree. Why, sometimes when I see that old lady sitting by the fireplace, looking at me with that look of hers while I'm writing for Mrs. Harvey, I feel as if next minute she might begin grilling me and the cold shivers run down my back."

She was becoming more and more expansive, this composed creature of the opaque surfaces and resolutely still manner, and Andrea found herself wondering if this were the real woman, relieved to allow herself the natural outlet of words, and whether her decorous quiet had been part of the armor she assumed for her professional duties, to know all and yet to avoid being "too fresh." Andrea doubted whether all this could interest her father. She was not sure he quite took it in until he surprised her by answering with an acquiescent sadness:

"Yes, that's it. I'm in the midst of chaos. I know I'm right, but I can't prove it. If I tried, they'd laugh at me."

"That's it," said Miss Bixby promptly. "And I tell you again we're in the same box and we've got to make an alliance, offensive and defensive. Where," she said, so briskly that he started and looked at her apprehensively, she was bringing him down with such a jerk to the concrete terms he hated, "where is your stuff? the thing you've discovered?"

He seemed to feel obliged to answer her.

"In there," he said, in a low tone, turning.

She was on the point of rising.

"Want to show it to me?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"Want to let me see the flashes you get? You let them see it. Mrs. Harvey said you did."

Again he shook his head and, after a moment's thoughtful consideration of him, she cheerfully acquiesced.

"Very well," she said. "Suit yourself. Sometime you will. Now this is what I have to propose. I'll give up the Harveys — it's only a question of time before they give up me — and you and your daughter and I'll go into partnership together. Ever do anything yourself?" she inquired of Andrea, turning upon her with a brisk practicality.

"Do anything?" repeated Andrea. "I've learned stenography and typewriting. I need practice. I can't work very fast."

"No, no," said Miss Bixby, with unbroken good humor. "Thought reading, automatic writing, anything of that sort."

"No," said Andrea, not, she hoped, showing her repugnance to the imputation. "Never."

"Well," said Miss Bixby, "no doubt you could. Some day we'll sit down together and you can try. The first thing we'll do is to put a card in the papers; but only after we've got you pretty well written up, Mr. Dove, your theory, you know, that communication's coming through science if it comes at all. We can manage that. We'll have you interviewed, photographs of this place — it's a dandy place for a big publicity article — and then the card, advertising automatic writing and demonstrations of olympium, whatever they are."

He took fire. The blood ran into his face and his head was high.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "you are proposing an advertising fraud to me, a man that stands as I do, a man whose name is going down — "

There he stuck, in inarticulate anger, and she interrupted him with a quiet practicality that seemed to prick his heroic decencies.

"Yes, Mr. Dove, I know all about it. You've got the old idea of the scientist in his laboratory, dying over his retorts, and then the world finding out he was the biggest toad ever and carving his name on friezes of libraries and museums. But it won't work. The world's different now, and it won't wash. There's not a darned thing you can get now without publicity."

Her qualifying word she used with such a simple belief in its value that it seemed to fit her decorous ensemble. She was convincing in her single-mindedness, and she went on with an added earnestness of persuasion toward the course she was offering them in good faith, — for was it not to their advantage as to hers?

"Now say we put our card in the paper, we start out, you demonstrating your scientific theory and piecing it out, when you come to breaks in it, with — whatever you know will piece it out. Science can't be worth much if it hasn't got its own particular frauds, same as everything else. There's the right side of things and there's the wrong side. If there wasn't a wrong there wouldn't be a right. And I do the automatic writing. We'd rake in money hand over fist. And you'd be at your invention, don't you see, nights and Sundays. Why, you'd be made, we'd all be made."

Mr. Dove walked to the door and opened it.

"Andrea," he said, "tell her to go."

Miss Bixby rose, with a composed readiness. She was so used to secretarial obedience that any form of discipline came easily to her.

"There's just one thing more, Mr. Dove," she said. "If your stuff's anything like radium, it's worth thousands and thousands of dollars. Don't you know it is?"

He made no reply. She had, too, a word for Andrea, a quick, low word in passing.

"When's he likely to be out? You let me know and I'll bring my camera and take a picture of the rooms."

Before Andrea could speak, and perhaps reading her shocked face and unwilling to accept an answer that would have been adequate expression of the look, Miss Bixby passed her and went on to the door where Mr. Dove still stood, erect and vigilant. He looked as if he were guarding something. It seemed to be his house, but really it was what he remembered as his honor. When she reached him, Miss Bixby hesitated and looked up at him with a word on her lips; but he made a slight imperative gesture and she went on. He closed the door behind her and then fell to trembling, went to Andrea and said, in a childish way:

"They mustn't insult us, must they? To think — a man like me — "

Andrea put her arms about him and held him to her. What was he, she thought passionately, but an ill-used child? Life itself had broken him. It had made him do himself wrong with the Harveys though they meant him well; but now he had vindicated his honor before this woman who would have corrupted him.

"Daddy," she said, "we must go away. We'll find a place none of these people know about." Then she made her desperate appeal. "I've been wicked. I've lied to them. I must tell them. And after I've told them, I can't see them ever any more."

"Yes, yes," he said, in a perfunctory acquiescence. "We'll go away."

For an instant she believed she could tell him what new actor had come into the confusion of her life: Beatrice, unconsciously disputing with her the allegiance of the dead. She had the page of her own mounting remorses ready for his reading: how she had believed she was wronging only her poor self, and then it was Brooke she had wronged and now it was Beatrice. But what would it mean to him? What would any mortal drama mean? nothing, unless it touched olympium.

XV

ANDREA slept soundly, but she woke in terror. She was afraid to see her father. He had met Miss Bixby like a man, but if he had now slipped back again to his former state she felt no strength in her to bear it. Her own self-tormenting mind must keep its poise, at least until she had seen what his mental weather was likely to be. It proved very dark and shifty, the sort she dreaded. When he came out, long after she had put the room in order, he was fractious, impatient of delays in even the least particulars, and his face told her he had slept but little. He scarcely glanced at her and spoke curtly, as he did when he was deep in experiment, as if she were some unconsidered instrument of his will. He drank his coffee hastily, standing, and made no pretence at breaking bread.

"My packing," said he, "is done. You should have done yours, too, last night. We must be away from here to-day."

"But father," she reminded him, "we can't go until we've found a place."

"I am going up to some of those South End streets," he said, "where we looked first. You can go round here. Take this part of the hill and see if there's anything possible. Don't engage it. I can't tell what I shall want to do."

She made no answer, and he took down his hat and coat.

"Daddy," she said, hesitating, "you know you've always said we mustn't both be away at the same time."

He paused, hat and coat in hand.

"I know," he said, "and it's truer than ever. We're not the only ones to know what's in there. We've given away our secret, Andrea, given it away. Did you hear what that woman said about olympium? She said, 'If it's anything like radium it's worth thousands of dollars.' She's a crook, but she's no fool."

Andrea was bent only on keeping him at home.

"Don't go," she said. "Let me try the West End first. After luncheon you'll feel rested. You can go then and leave me here."

But this seemed only to irritate him into a more urgent haste.

"I've got to go," he said. "You stay here and look out for the olympium. The sooner we get away the better. Harvey's a crook. They're all crooks. They'll do us, Andrea, yet. They'll steal it away from us. Last night it came to me Harvey might have sent that woman to get round me. A spy, do you see? Harvey's a rich man. A man that's played the money game as he has, keeps on playing it. My olympium, that's his game now. He wants it, and he means to have it."

"You didn't think so when you sent him the keys," she reminded him. "And nothing's happened since."

He waved that away.

"Yes, there has," he said. "They sent that woman. But they won't find what I called my mechanical toy. I've taken it apart so the devil himself couldn't put it together. I've packed it in a box and I shall take that with me."

He went into the laboratory and returned at once,

carrying a small wooden box she remembered to have seen in their last moving.

"Where is the olympium?" she asked him. "In the usual place?"

"The usual place," he answered, as if he were propitiating, cajoling her. "Remember the rule, Andrea: if you want to hide a thing, put it in plain sight."

And now, in the best of spirits, he was hurrying off, laughing softly, as it seemed, at his own cleverness in outwitting a world of crooks. But at the door he stopped and considered for a moment, nodding, with lips compressed.

"After all," he said, "you're right. You shall go, and when you come back I'll take my turn. Not to go out together," he repeated laughing, in the sly way she hated. "That was it, wasn't it, Andrea? That's what we always said."

And now that he had bidden her go, she stood a moment, trying to get a grip on her scared nerves, recalling her composure and asking herself what it was her part to do. To go out, she told herself, when the terror he had raised in her died with ebbing heart beats, to do the immediate practical thing and find a place to live. She put on her hat and coat, left the table in disorder and went. And there before her door was the Harveys' car and Brooke himself just stepping out. Involuntarily she turned, fumbling for her key, but he was at her side.

"Would you mind — " he began, and she met the sad sincerity of his eyes.

What was that new look there? Was it all grief over his brother's death, or had she herself darkened those clear wells of light?

He put his question.

"Would you mind not going in?"

He had expected her to open the door for him to enter, and she lacked heart to own she meant to run away from him.

"Thank you," he said. "If you don't mind talking here a minute. First, I've brought you what Phil sent."

She had put Beatrice out of her mind, not to be remembered again until the moment of confession. But now here was Beatrice, invisible yet no less implacable instrument of the avenging powers.

He continued:

"His fob, you know. I told you. He made me take it that day before. He kept insisting he would come out of it; but that was to keep me from getting rattled. Besides he did love to play the game. You know Phil." He took a twist of white paper from his pocket and held it out to her. "Just as he gave it to me. I haven't opened it."

She looked at it in what seemed to him mysteriously like horror. She made no move to take it.

"Why," she asked, "do you bring it to me?"

He was amazed.

"Why?" he said. "You've told me why. I own I didn't know who it was he meant, though I thought I did, and so I didn't ask him. But you told me yourself yesterday. You told all of us. You married Phil and of course he sent his token to you. Of course!"

She stood looking down at the pavement. He seemed little more than a voice pronouncing judgment on her. She thought a great many things in that instant. It seemed to her that forces were fighting to give her back her old simple honesty; but she was too tired with all that had passed, too torn by anxiety for her father and inability to judge what was best for him, to know what force was on the side of her sick soul and what was condoning

the perjury that had played the devil with her life. And she remembered Beatrice. And suddenly one of the armies fled, in great rout and confusion, and she believed the conquering force was commanding her to confess her lie here, now, and make an end of warfare. She looked up at him with the words ready on her lips, and he was gazing at her in such simple tenderness and compassion that she forbore.

"You know," he said, stumbling on the words, for he was very boyish when it came to things he felt deeply, "I ought to have given it to you yesterday, the first minute, but it was all so strange — Phil never speaking to me about you — and you — why, you know I thought I was the one that found you, and it seems it was Phil, after all. So far as I can see, it's all an awful mix-up because we looked alike, — though," he added, as if to himself, his brows meeting in perplexity, "we don't look so much alike as all that comes to."

This told her something else. He was, in his simple honor, snatching at the same justification to account for her coming to his arms. He had been thinking it out, and all he could find to solve the puzzle was this specious supposition that Phil and he were alike and, lacking Phil, she had caught at him. But he was the most normal, though one of the most fanciful of men, and she could see how he would hate the solution even while he caught at it. And she was right. He had been hoodwinking himself into his old belief in her, he had accepted a psychologic melée of the affections, odious to him and yet to be accepted like delirium or some temporary disfiguration illness might have fastened on her. But there was one thing more she had to know.

"If you didn't," she said, "believe in me yesterday, why do you believe in me to-day?"

"Why," he said remindingly, with his compassionate smile, "I've had time to think it over. Yesterday, don't you see, it struck me, biff! it knocked me out. But when I'd got my wind back I knew it's so because you say it. We can't go back of that."

And looking up at him again, that unusual quality of his eyes, the soft sincerity of them, she knew if she destroyed his belief in her she would be killing something as vital as life itself. It would be a murder of something in his soul that had withstood the cankering force of a good deal of worldly wisdom and first hand contact with the war.

"And," he was saying, flushing now with the difficulty of it, the flourish of emotions he would have chosen to keep hidden to make themselves apparent only in the acts of every day, "I want to say now — and I won't say it again — I'm right here. I know pretty well what old Phil would want me to do, and so does father. Mother'll see it, too, when she's got hold of herself. Mum isn't herself, you know," he added impulsively. "She's gone daffy over her spirit writing. But she'll wear through that. Dad'll pull her through."

As she heard the beloved voice promising her the kindly intercourse of common life, her resolution weakened. Perhaps these Harveys were the more enchanting to her because she had lived at such high tension for so many years that life itself seemed daily tragedy. And she compounded with that conquering battalion of her mind, beseeching it to spare her action for one hour more. If she confessed now she loosed the spring that held an impenetrable wall above her, ready to fall between her and the light of day. Could not Beatrice wait? When at last she had her token, she could triumph for the rest of her life over the woman who had nothing. They had walked

away a little, out of the chauffeur's hearing, and continued pacing back and forth, and now Brooke put out his hand and again tendered her the twist of paper.

"So!" he said. It meant a great deal, all they had been formulating. "So," the frank voice told her, "since you are Phil's wife and the thing is yours, take it."

And that recalled her to the inexorable fact that you can't live upon the abstractions of a chosen course; you have to accept its concrete issues.

"No," she said violently, "no. Don't let me touch it, don't let me hear it mentioned. Why!" and here her over-driven mind that seemed to have been growing more and more sluggish these last minutes awoke and again remembered Beatrice. "If you thought you knew the girl he was sending it to, why not give it to her? If there is another woman who thinks —"

Here she stopped bewildered at the first turning of the labyrinth. She was about to repeat, "Give it to her, in God's name," but that would be to demolish the credulities he had pieced together. And even for this last inconsistency he had a theory. The mantle of his inventiveness seemed big enough to cover even her own involuntary testimony.

"Now," he said, "you mustn't do that, mustn't let yourself. However queer this is, the whole business, there's no room for doubt where Phil's concerned. He wasn't that sort. If he cared enough about you — and he did —" he added emphatically, as if to assure himself again of his own acquiescence — "why, that's all there was to it. He simply did. And if he'd ever thought he had a fancy for another girl, that had to go, same as fancies do when the real thing comes along. You're jealous, just a little bit. But don't be. Remember, it's old Phil!"

But he thrust the twist of paper into his pocket, either to punish her, she thought, as you'd pretend to punish a dear child, or because he judged the time for insisting was not yet. He was saying, in the commonplace way he had of putting her at her ease:

"Almost forgot my errand. My father wants you to come home with me."

She was at once on the defensive.

"Oh, no," she said. "I can't do that."

"He's got a good deal to tell you," Brooke went on, in no slightest doubt of convincing her. "He'd have come here, only he had an idea your father's in a bad way, likely to be excited and all that. And I've an idea he means to propose something very much to your father's advantage."

Suddenly her heart grew light, as if she had been suffocating in a fetid place and the cool sweet air had blown on her and her lungs expanded and she was saved. It was Peter Harvey who was saving her, the merciful kindness of him, as she had felt the message his spirit sent forth unconsciously in the first moment she saw him. She could ask to see him alone, she could tell him that she was a liar and beg him, as she knew him to be merciful, to do her the one last mercy of letting her disappear from them completely. He would tell Beatrice. He would take the task of wiping the need of her out of Brooke's mind. It would be as if she were dead; better, for there would be no danger of disquieting rumors from some spirit world to thicken the atmosphere of this.

"Yes," she heard herself saying, "I should like to see your father. Not your mother, please."

Brooke answered cheerfully and the more readily because he thought she might well dread his mother's jealous unbelief.

"Mother's gone to a lecture. Wanted me to go with her. Something about the dead surviving. Can't stand it. Dad can't and I can't either. She made me read some of the things Miss Bixby's written down. It adds a horror to death. If that's Phil — well!"

He had put her into the car and taken his place, rambling on without expecting answers, because he thought they had gone deep enough into the half light between them and she must be left with all possible composure to meet his father.

"I don't know why," he said, "but every hair on my spine rises when they begin to tell me what Phil says. Like a dog's, you know. Why, I know him as —" he paused and quite unconsciously came a simile that made her pulses leap to him — "as I know you. And if it's Phil — if it could be — why, any one of a hundred words he could think of, words I know, too — they'd mean volumes — they'd tell me. Not this popular lecture room slush." But immediately he caught himself up, remembering her father. "They tell me your father says science is going to do it. I could believe that — if I could believe anything."

Suddenly, for after all she didn't know very much about this young sky god who had come down to her, she wanted to hear what he did believe, not about the dead only, but everything. That unappeased spiritual thirst was upon her which prompts lovers new to each other to desire with passion each other's image and print it on their own.

"But you do," she said, "believe. You believe they are alive."

He was silent a moment. Then he said gravely:

"Yes, I believe they're alive — because they can't be dead. I've seen too many of them. And Phil — do you suppose —" Suddenly he felt the incongruity of a talk

like this, whirling along in the brilliant day. "Here we are," he said, and opened the door for her. Then he told the chauffeur he was to go for Mrs. Harvey. It was an hour away, and Andrea made note of it, so that she might herself be gone. Still, she thought drearily, what she had to say would not take long.

XVI

BROOKE let her in and took her to the library. She entered the room with relief, because Peter Harvey was there. That meant kindness, an even unreasoning sympathy. But he was not alone. By the fire sat Madam Brooke, charming in lilac and white, greeting her by a slight movement that seemed to indicate an impulse of rising from her chair and the immediate conclusion that youth would forgive her continued sitting. Peter Harvey came forward and took Andrea's hand. The hearty grasp seemed to promise, at the outset, all those things she knew she might expect of him. He gave her a chair between the library table and the fire and went back to his accustomed place. There Andrea was, she realised, not alone with him but with three of them ranged, not against her, it was true, but in an unrecognised coalition to interrogate her. They were bent on understanding her and absolutely unaware that she was not correspondingly eager to be understood. But all their predisposition toward her could not rob the coming inquisition of its menace. She might have asked Brooke to leave her alone with his father; but it was an impossibility to beg this frail yet inexorably powerful old woman to go out of the room and out of the case. You couldn't do that to old women of her sort; and besides, it wouldn't work. She wouldn't go. She was kindness itself, but she was also unquestioning assertiveness. She had reached the point where mortality, under the heel of the tyrant Time, with a smiling arro-

gance soon to be smothered in dust, wields unbending authority over its last brief hour.

Peter Harvey began at once.

"My dear, we were upset yesterday, all of us. Then this boy here—" he smiled at Brooke, who had seated himself on a couch in the darker background—"he came bursting in on us and we hadn't eyes or ears for anything. But I don't want to lose any time in telling you we're with you—" he was about to add "all of us" when he remembered his wife—and ended, temporising: "Mother Brooke, you're with us, aren't you, Brooke and me? We don't mean to grill you or question you or make you prove things," he went on, so confident of Madam Brooke's answer that he left her no time to make it. "We simply want to do what Phil himself would expect if he'd got round to telling us."

Andrea sat looking at him, lost for a moment in her recognition of his simple human kindness. It was too perfect a thing to be destroyed. She loved it so much that she was drawn on to test it further, the beautiful thing born of his own goodness of heart, fathered by her lie, before her confession beat its bright head down into the dust.

"Still," she said, "you don't know a single thing about me except what I've told you."

Brooke moved suddenly as if he were about to rise and speak, but it was his father who answered, with the exquisite gentleness that comes only from the heart.

"My dear," he said, "you carry your credentials with you."

"A trick of the muscles about the eyes," put in Madam Brooke quietly.

"So," said Peter Harvey, "I want to tell you I'm going to deposit a sum of money where you can draw on it. I

sha'n't pester your father by talking about syndicates and demonstrations. He's in no condition to be approached in that way. So far as his work is concerned, matters will be left entirely in your hands."

Andrea spoke in a moved voice that made Madam Brooke look at her curiously. It was a voice of extreme emotion, an ecstasy of gratitude perhaps, yet shot through with fear.

"But," she said, "I can't take money from you, even for father. I've come to see that. He can't — " she hesitated and then went on — "he can't be allowed to take it."

"It isn't from me," said Peter Harvey. He always seemed, at these moments of tranquillizing the perturbed human soul, to have unending time at his disposal, an inexhaustible supply of patience. "It is from my son. You would have taken things from him if he had lived. That's all the more reason why I should see you have them now."

Andrea sat silent looking down at her hands, hard-worked hands, yet still delicate, clasped tightly in her lap. She was smiling a little, too, thinking how capriciously unaccountable life is, and, after all, how kind. Here was she face to face with the moment that should have brought her punishment, and it was offering her instead the sweetest proof she had ever had of the goodness in human hearts. It was a tremendous gift they brought her, these people, the mere knowledge of themselves. She might have lost her belief in herself, but she was gloriously confirmed in her belief in the world. And upon the heels of this, it came to her that the least she could do for them was to save them the reality of their own illusion. If she could leave them now while they still had faith in her, leave them merely to wonder, not to doubt, she would

have spared them the last injury of all: the knowledge of evil that seemed somehow not yet to have corroded their soft hearts. And she forgot Beatrice. In the moment of her thinking these things she seemed to be removed into that vague distance where the visionary is the only true. Madam Brook recalled her. Here were facts again, the challenge, the demand, and Andrea felt herself flung again upon the spears of sharp interrogation.

"You said," the old lady remarked quietly, though her authoritative voice was never without an arresting significance, "you were married on the tenth of August."

Brooke moved slightly, and Peter nodded in his direction, as if to say, "I agree with you. Leave it to me. I'll quash it."

Before Andrea had recovered herself to the point of answering, Peter answered for her:

"Mother Brooke, I propose leaving all these details for the present. Naturally we want to know how everything came about. It's a part of Phil's life. But we're going to see a lot of this dear girl, and she'll understand how we feel about that and want to tell us, as much as we long to hear. But just now the important thing seems to be to get her father into condition for going on with his work. It's easy to see how much that means to him. I should doubt if he could live without it. Everything else'll come in good time."

Madam Brooke waited, with no apparent impatience, for him to finish, and then repeated, in a tone perhaps a shade warmer, as if assuring Andrea she might trust the impelling force behind it:

"I'm sure she won't mind telling me whether it was the tenth of August."

And now to Andrea the world and the laws that governed it did not look so irresponsibly kind. The question,

like a huge creature with gigantic wings, seemed to be winnowing her before it into the gulf of lost hopes and tarnished destinies. Yet she must answer, and after that, whatever she said, the wings would beat on her the faster.

"Yes," she said, her stiff lips trembling, "the tenth of August."

Here Brooke surprised her.

"No," he said vehemently. "Think what you mean to say."

Andrea had no experience of legal procedure, but she did know that a lawyer often has to remind his client that unguarded words may be used against him. It seemed to her Brooke was reminding her, not to tell the truth without fear, but to reflect whether the truth would serve her. Madam Brooke looked at him quietly and perhaps drew some conclusion he detected, for he bit his lip.

"I gather," said the old lady, "Brooke's memory of the tenth of August, 1917, agrees with mine. I keep a diary." She ignored Andrea now, as if she wanted to spare herself the appeal of the girl's drawn face. "I find that on the tenth of August Phil got a day's leave to take Beatrice for a flight. They went off about nine in the morning and got back at five. Brooke, does your remembrance of the tenth of August agree with mine?"

Brooke was silent, sitting there on the couch, bent forward, his hands hanging, his glance on the floor. Andrea knew where his thoughts were, and how his memory went step by step with hers. He recovered himself, straightened, and faced his grandmother with a smile.

"A date!" he said, as if he really must beg her to consider how easy it is to mislay such trifling accuracies. "A day of the month! what difference does it make whether she remembers it was the tenth or one of two or three days the other side of it?"

"Her wedding day," said Madam Brooke. "A girl's wedding day!"

And increasingly it seemed to Andrea, turning from Brooke's harassed face to his father's, that she must save their faith in her. She raised her head and looked now at Madam Brooke, and was sure the keen eyes did not yet condemn her and that she could keep her own unflinchingly upon them.

"I should like," she began, "to explain—"

But what her next words would have been, she never knew. She was at one of those moments of magnificent audacity when the fighting soul challenges the harassed brain to act. The words were not required. A knock came at the door, sharp, importunate. Brooke rose, the door opened and Beatrice came in. She seemed to see nobody but Brooke whom, her first words made it apparent, she had come to find.

"He sent me something," she said. "I told you I could wait for it. I can't. Where is it?"

They had risen, all but Madam Brooke, and she, after her first glance at Beatrice, sat with her eyes on Andrea. It was not hostile, this look, but it did warn Andrea she was definitely under observation and might be called on at any instant to answer whatever misgivings the shifting aspect of the scene suggested. As for Beatrice, she was all life and loveliness, the red overrunning her cheeks and confidence smiling in her eyes. Brooke came forward to receive her, sorry for her, angry in a way, because she was rushing things, courting the knockout blow of meeting Andrea and hearing what she was to Phil. But Beatrice was not to be warned by any gravity of look or voice. She was in no sort of doubt or boding. She had thrown aside her grief.

"Where is it?" she insisted. "Brooke, give it to me."

Brooke, Andrea saw, put his hand to his pocket where he had thrust the twist of paper, and she found herself whispering, this to herself and unnoted by anybody except perhaps Madam Brooke: "Give it to her. Hurry! hurry!"

Beatrice continued, her shining eyes on Brooke's face, laughter — the agitated laugh of those who are unreasonably happy — in her voice.

"I have just had a letter from him. A letter? one line written, I should say, the minute before he went out on that last flight. It says — besides a word or two" — and here she paused an instant, flushing gloriously, because the unspoken word touched her to flame — "It says 'Brooke will give it to you. Look inside.' And that letter," she continued, as if amazed that angelic messengers themselves hadn't seen to the delivery of such a letter — "that letter's been delayed all these weeks. Brooke —" her voice dropped to a whisper, "what is it you've got for me?"

Brooke, quite pale now, stood there with the twist of paper in his hand. He turned slowly to Andrea and seemed to ask her counsel in a look. She tried to reach him through the veil that shuts mortal man from man, to will him with her soul, if it could be called her soul, to give the little twist of paper to Beatrice. And at that instant fate, the sad old kindly mourner over the sorrows of youth which yet insists on their being faced because, after all, it is but youth, spoke from the lips of Madam Brooke.

"Bee, your note says, 'Look inside.' I suggest Brooke lets you take whatever he's got there and you see what the note means by 'Look inside.'"

Brooke put out his hand with the twist of paper and Beatrice took it hungrily. She unrolled the paper and the

fob dangled from its chain. It was an oblong with three sides of semi-precious stones and the fourth side of gold with florid ornamentation.

"I think," said Madam Brooke quietly, while Beatrice stood regarding it in a perplexity become suddenly grave, "it is made to open. That gold side is probably on a little hinge. My husband had one something like it. Put your nail under, my dear, and open it."

Beatrice did it, and the lid came up. Something white lay within. She took it out and unfolded it, a tiny oblong such as a chemist might wrap a powder in. It was covered with finest handwriting. She stood reading it, her face irradiated, forgetful of every living creature, of every fact or argument this might mean to them. She seemed to have been withdrawn from them, and only their silence at last recalled her. She looked from one to the other of the three — somehow she did not include Andrea at all or feel it necessary to apologize for the personal character of the interview — and laughed a little.

"It's all right," she assured them, "quite all right. I never shall doubt any more. I shan't even — mourn. He has said — everything."

Then, as Brooke's drawn face and Peter Harvey's mysteriously set countenance impressed her, she believed she ought to assure them also. She answered that remonstrance from her own mind.

"I can't," she said. "No, I can't. I'd let you see it if I could, but it's his and mine. Not even you — " She stopped, her eyes dwelling on Madam Brooke. There was a great tenderness in her gaze. It said she could admit age, its heart and brain scarred by the characters of life, where she could not let in anybody else. The old would take the heavenly secret soon to heaven itself, and with the others it would fade out under a thousand other memories.

"Yes," she said, with a lovely tenderness. "I'll let you."

Then she was at Madam Brooke's side, holding the paper so that she could see, and Madam Brooke, who had sat with her eye-glass dangling from her finger, read in a glance, flushed all over her fine old face and rose and kissed her.

"Yes," she said, "yes, my darling, that's all you need to know till you go to heaven and find him."

Beatrice turned her enchanted face from them and was out of the door as quickly as she had come, and all Andrea was conscious of was a despairing certainty that it was sad she had done what she had and that Madam Brooke could never call her darling. But Peter Harvey was on his feet, his face worried, his tone sharp with anxiety, quite unlike the Peter Harvey who had begun the morning with a general unworldliness of benevolence.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I've got to be told. If Phil — " he paused here, evidently realising there must be a big omission of what they had accepted concerning Andrea — and adding, after the dubious interval was safely behind him, "Why the devil's he sending notes to Bee?"

"We don't know," said Brooke savagely. "We don't know anything except that Phil — father, Phil never did a thing in his life that wasn't square."

"And," continued Peter, feeling his way along the labyrinth, "if he did want to say something to Bee, why not write it and send it through the mails, like any man with his wits about him?"

"Because," said Brooke, "that wasn't Phil. Phil had the most disorderly wits I ever saw, where his private affairs were concerned. I don't believe he'd ever settled it in his own mind he wanted to write till that last minute

when he got the hunch he wasn't coming back. And then he'd given me the fob and he remembered he hadn't explained there was something inside. He couldn't get at me to tell me. I'd gone out earlier, you understand. So he wrote that last line. And if it just referred to the other that had been written earlier and didn't say anything particular besides, — why, that's Phil."

"Yes," said Madam Brooke quietly, "that's Phil."

"But," said Peter Harvey, still from his maze, "why Bee? Why not" — There he paused, for he could not add, "Why not Andrea?"

Brooke burst into a laugh. It was one of immense relief. He put his hand to his forehead wet with the sweat of this last ordeal.

"What a fool!" he said, "what a fool I was not to think. Why, what he wrote Bee was asking her to understand. He'd been awfully fond of Bee. At that last minute he saw things clear. Fellows said they did, other fellows when they were going in, and he wrote her he'd meant to be honest and asked her — well, asked her to understand. And she's so relieved to know he'd only been muddle-headed, not what she was afraid — no wonder she was half daffy, dear old Bee."

"Mother," said Peter Harvey, "was that so? You might tell us that much about what you read. Was that so?"

Madam Brooke paid no attention. She turned to Andrea.

"My dear," she said, "you've heard what Bee said. She had a letter from Phil, delayed. Phil's father and mother had a letter from him this morning — delayed. Wherever those last words he wrote went in their delay, they went together. Now, did you have a letter from Phil this morning?"

Andrea looked at her in a hopeless silence. And she was aware that Harvey was frowning at her, not yet in displeasure but that attempt to understand. If she was ever to confess her sin toward them, must it not be now? Madam Brooke was speaking quietly, in an expository clearness, not reasoning, not drawing conclusions, but as if she were merely holding up a fabric in the sun and bidding them look at it.

"Our dear boy at the last minute before going out to what he thought would be his death, writes two letters — two enclosures of a few lines each. He sends one to his father and mother and one to his old playmate. Oughtn't there to have been a third letter? Isn't there anything strange in his not having a word to say to his — wife?"

On the last word she hesitated and offered it, not sceptically, but in a way Andrea could not endure. To her inflamed mind a whole accusation lay in it, and she called on her coward soul to meet it. She rose to her feet to be ready to go the instant she should have made the short confession the challenge of the words demanded. But suddenly, through her maze of trouble she became aware that Brooke was at her side, that he had taken up her muff and was offering it to her.

"Not to-day," he was saying, in a voice of heavenly kindness. "Let me take you home now. Dad, we don't need to talk any more to-day?"

It was a question, but it was a petition also. Peter Harvey would have liked to talk a great deal more to-day; he was feverishly anxious to get these half lights and shadows clarified to fit the field of common vision. But he could read the boy's face and voice. Andrea's too. For some reason they had had enough, these young things, and they mustn't be pressed too far. Doubtless they knew what they could stand. And if the limit had been reached, he wasn't the man to urge them further.

"Quite right," he agreed. "No more to-day. Only you're to remember, my dear, that to-morrow morning at the latest there'll be some money in the bank. Everything shall be written out clearly."

He offered her his hand, but Andrea, smiling at him her pitiful smile, did not take it. She would have been glad to kiss the merciful hand, but that was foolish, an indulgence she had no claim to. Brooke seemed like a friendly wind blowing her out of the room and out of the house, and when the outer door had closed on them, Peter Harvey turned to Madam Brooke and asked:

"Well?" Then, as she did not answer: "What do you make of it?"

XVII

MADAM BROOKE looked at him thoughtfully.

"I don't know what I make of it," she said. "But there are one or two things I'm absolutely sure of. One is that Phil never married her."

Peter Harvey's eyes started until she laughed out and said:

"If you stood your hair on end you'd look like the funny pictures of a man seeing a ghost."

"Not married her?" he repeated. "Of course he married her. Hasn't she proved it?"

"How?" asked the old lady quietly.

"How? Why, you heard her. You were there when she told us."

"She proved it because she said so," continued Madam Brooke placidly. "And yet, Peter, you're not a born fool, either."

His eyes refused to resume their natural size. He sat staring at her in undiminished perplexity, and so sunken into himself, in the confessed inability of coping with the affair, that he looked ten years older. Madam Brooke, regarding him satirically though kindly, thought he was really at least a quarter of a century older than she, because she felt herself on the job, as Brooke would say, and Peter was, emotionally speaking, ebbing away from it.

"I don't see," he said, in an argumentative tone intensified by his realisation that he had failed so far to see

anything, "that the fact that she has failed to receive a delayed letter is any evidence at all."

"It isn't," said Madam Brooke tranquilly. "It's only odd, if she's what she says she is. I didn't say it was evidence. I said it was odd. And it is."

"And you mean to tell me," he blustered, "that a girl who looks like that — "

Here he paused, conscious of the absence of argument, and she replied:

"Just what I told you before: the superciliary muscles."

"Superciliary muscles!" he repeated, welcoming a term to vent his spleen on. "It's no sort of argument to use words a fellow never heard of. And what the devil does superciliary mean, anyway?"

"It's those muscles over the eyebrows," she explained. "The minute the girl had gone, that first day, I looked it up. That's what gives her that look of perfect sincerity — limpidity, the Henry Jamesians would call it."

"So you don't believe in it?" said Peter. "You don't believe in her."

"Not believe in her?" cried Madam Brooke. "Why, I believe in her down to the ground. I don't care whether it's the superciliary muscles or what. I just believe in her."

"You say she's an impostor."

"I never said any such thing."

"You implied it. At least you think she's lied."

"Oh," said Madam Brooke, from an amazing amplitude of tolerance, "if she's lied — I don't know why I say 'if.' Of course she's lied. But I'll bet you — ten shares of railroad stock, the ones that don't pay — I'll bet you it's a nice clean whopper, consecrated as a church."

"Brooke believes in her," said Peter reflectively. "That's evident."

"Brooke!" There was unmeasured scorn in her tone. "Brooke's in love with her."

"In love with her!" he repeated, so ingenuously horrified that she burst into a crow of laughter. "His brother's wife?"

"How often must I tell you," she composed herself to say, "she's not his wife. Lord, Peter! it's well you're not set on being justice of the Supreme Court or any of those things that require an unprejudiced mind."

"Does he know it?" Peter hurled at her. "Brooke, I mean."

"I couldn't say. It would be rather queer though if I could see it and he not."

Then Peter diverged from the matter in hand to wipe his forehead and remark, in an impetuosity between a groan and an imprecation:

"I'm glad you're usually on my side. I shouldn't want to see you trying to lay me by the heels."

"I trace it back," she told him, "this whole business and the state of mind we've got into, to this psychical infection. I don't know what else to call it. Isabel used to be a dove. What is she now? I don't know any bird naughty enough. She pecks your finger. She's so determined to prove there's a continued state of being that she's willing to let this old earth dry up and bust for all the attention she pays to it. She's trying to find her son that's gone, and she's going to give the son that's here a good deal of a jolt, if she doesn't look out, by forgetting all about him."

"Go ahead," said Peter. "I thought I'd escaped the infection, but I s'pose I haven't. What's it done to me?"

She had no idea of sparing him.

"You?" said she. "You've lost your grip. If there was a prize for absolute mental futility, you'd have got it,

Peter, the way you've just been going on. That girl's father, now, from all you've told me, is precisely like the old parties that lost their heads over the elixir of youth. And this girl — she's been tried too far. She's devoted herself to her father and he's fed on her like a vampire and now her brain's so wuzzy she doesn't know t'other from which."

"You'd say she told the lie to save her father?"

"I don't know. For how would it save him, when you come to that?"

"I can't see," he owned helplessly.

"I can't either. I do see she wants money, but she must have been able to tell by the look of you, Peter, she could get it out of you without any such melodrama as this."

"She may not be so inventive as you. Melodrama may be the only thing that occurred to her."

"Maybe. But she's made one big mistake, and I don't see how, with the best will in the world, we can save her from the consequences."

"A mistake?"

"Telling her yarn before Isabel. You and I are all right. If she stood up and confessed to us — and I could swear she was going to this morning if Brooke hadn't lost his head and dragged her away — if she confessed to us we'd look at her eyebrows and say: 'Don't mention it.' But Isabel never'll forgive her because she's made light of her son."

Peter Harvey had long recognized the value of judicious silences. They were the rests in the harmony of life, particularly marital harmony.

"I don't see," he ventured, watching Madam Brooke with an inquiring eye, since, if she wasn't with him here, he'd better have preserved one of his silences toward her

also, "I don't see why Isabel should ever know. The girl will go away — "

"Oh, will she?" scoffed the old lady. "Ask Brooke what he's going to do about that."

"Well, what the devil — " he began, pausing there from sheer inability to find words of a combined adequacy and mildness.

She echoed him placidly.

"Yes, what the devil! The only thing we can do is to form a coalition, you and I. For this girl isn't going, as they say in the books, out of our lives. She'll stay right in 'em if only by breaking Brooke's heart by going out of his. There's the car. There's Isabel. Look at her, dear little Belle! she's had some kind of message from that debating society they keep in session in spirit life. That's what some of 'em call it, you know, 'passed over into spirit life.' Don't you let 'em say it about me, Peter. Say I'm dead."

"You won't be dead," said Peter, joining her at the window where she stood looking down on Isabel talking to Miss Bixby who had just come up. Miss Bixby had come in a taxi, at high speed, and Peter wondered sadly if her haste had something to do with emergencies in the spirit world.

"No," said Madam Brooke, "you may bet all your railroad stock on that. But I'm not going to join their debating circles, and if they insist on it I sha'n't stay, that's all."

"You said this psychic business had driven us all daffy," said Peter. "What's it done to her, to Bixby? Is she a fraud now?"

"No," said the old lady. "I'm not prepared to go so far as that. Not entirely. She's in it for what she can get; at least that's what she went into it for. But look at

the spark in her eyes, that fanatical spark. It's come there within a month. Even Bixby's not living entirely in this world. Still, we know she's part fraud or she wouldn't have walked into our trap. Pretty clumsy trap! but it worked. When you going to tell Isabel?"

"Not yet, not till some of this has quieted down."

"Then Bixby'll get her discharge."

"Yes, she's got to. Only I wish to God I could manage it some way without hurting Belle."

"I don't know," mused the old lady, "of any possible way of influencing Isabel now unless we could get that infernal spiritual convention on our side. If they'd send her a message written by Bixby on a roll of wall paper! But just when they could do you some good they shut up and leave you floundering. I'll go upstairs. I never want to see Isabel when she's been communing with — whatever it is. I fly out and she winces."

She ran up the stairs at her lightest — and she was, on occasion, an agile old lady — and went on into Isabel's sitting-room. There she stood a moment, and smiled, noting the disorder of the writing table. Miss Bixby, the pattern of exactitude, must, she judged, have been called off in haste after that morning's writing, for the paper lay outspread, the pencil lying on it as if it had fallen after the last words. She went over to the table and this was what she read:

"Not in your sense of the word. You wouldn't understand."

For a long minute she stood thinking. Then she took the pencil and wrote, in the free hand before her:

"You can understand this. You will be asked to forgive. Do it fully, freely. Accept her. Forgive."

She laid the pencil down, looked round at the door and, struck by the quiet of the room, laughed a little to think how safe it seemed to meddle with mortal minds.

XVIII

Brooke walked beside Andrea, for a couple of blocks, not speaking, merely deepening in her the impression that there was no getting rid of him. But that was not, at the moment, of any great concern to her. He was only one wearing force the more, and what did that matter now she had begun to see how all the armies of circumstance are hostile to the evil doer? These powers were not only so malicious but so infernal in their cleverness that they had now conceived the cruelty of taking away her free will. There had been the moment when she thought she could confess to Peter Harvey, and another when she knew, if she could escape the interrogation of mercilessly clear eyes, she could write out her damnation. But she had delayed too long. Even this last coward's makeshift had been taken away from her by the purely accidental circumstance of the delayed letter. Yet was anything ever accidental? Was not this her actual punishment? She had paltered and hidden herself behind her own vain desires of what she would or would not let them think of her. Nemesis, as impersonal as a hound on the scent, did not care what the Harveys thought of her. Nemesis had gone unerringly on, nose to the ground, and now the padding steps were close behind her. Whatever she said now, Brooke and his father could never be sure she had meant to say anything. Her confession had been made for her. What virtue, what decency even would there be

in her confirming it? Again she saw how terribly she had wanted to convince them that, liar as she was, she had, at the last, turned away from her lie.

"Too bad!" she said, under her breath. "Too bad!"

But he heard it.

"You've got to talk this out with me, you know," he told her. "I sha'n't let you out of my sight till you do."

"What would be the use?" she answered drearily. "When a thing is spoiled it's spoiled."

"Just what are you doing?" he asked her. "What is it, anyhow? Are you, giving Phil up to Bee like that sentimental rot we put into books? You're not that kind. I'd bet my life you're not that kind."

"No," she said, and hurried on the faster because it was suddenly unbearable to have him there beside her, questioning, pursuing her into the fastnesses of her hidden life, to be gentle with her there, but always with that loving cruelty of trying to see her as she was. She fell into a frenzy of haste. At all costs she must be rid of him. But he had only to quicken his stride, and he had breath in plenty after hers had failed.

"Or do you think," he pursued, "Phil somehow played it on you? You couldn't think that. Nobody could that knew him ten minutes, let alone —"

"No," she said.

"You can't have got up some nightmare of his being really fond of Bee and this foolish business of the message proving it and cutting you out altogether."

"No," she said again, "I don't think that — or anything. Except that I must get home. I've got to see my father and make our plans. You must let me alone. Please, please let me alone — all of you. I'll write you the whole story, every word. But that won't do any good now," she added, to herself.

"No," said Brooke quietly, "you won't write me. You'll talk to me and you'll do it this very day, and within half an hour. You might as well, for I sha'n't leave you if I have to force myself into your house and question you before your father. He'll know, perhaps. He'll tell me if you won't. A man would understand — "

They had turned the corner into the dreary street of stables and she stopped.

"Do you see that?" she asked.

"What?"

"That's your Miss Bixby. She came out of our door."

This, Brooke saw, annoyed or worried her, and she started on walking slowly, her eyes on Miss Bixby who, in a great hurry, was approaching. She saw them, stopped short as Andrea had, evidently in her turn surprised, bethought herself and came on rapidly. She was trigly furled as ever, with tight veil and tailored surfaces, and to Brooke, who had not, in these few days, given her a more than casual glance, she looked as usual. He took off his hat and was about to pass when Andrea stopped. Miss Bixby went on a step, thought better of it and also stopped.

"Did you want to see me?" Andrea asked her.

Miss Bixby smiled and answered with an airy unconcern that sat upon her oddly.

"No, not for anything new. I thought I might talk things over again, on the same lines, you know. I'll try again when I'm sure of finding you. Excuse me. I have to run along. Mrs. Harvey will be home."

She hurried away with the same air of unconcern, and Andrea went on thoughtfully:

"I'm sorry," she said, "to have her go there when my father is alone. I hate to have him bothered."

At the door she stopped and turned to Brooke, begging

him, by her glance, most eloquently, to leave her. But he met her eyes unmoved. His mouth was firmly set, his eyes narrowed. He was no longer the sun-god who had come down from the skies. He had even lost that extraordinary resemblance to Philip who, in the picture, was youth itself at its gayest, running over with the love of life. This was a man of stern decision who knew what he wanted and had sworn to himself either to get it or to detain it, at least, until he had learned every aspect of his title to it. The war had changed him from the sun-god to the fighting man, and if it had left him any vestige of his young joyance, she herself, in these last two days, had taken it from him. Life had hacked at him with her broadsword and the woman had done the rest.

"Go in," he said.

"Good-by," she answered, knowing it was futile, and he took the key from her hand, opened the door and signed to her to enter.

"Go in," he said again, and, in a way mysterious to her, she lost the will to withstand him. She entered. He followed, closed the door behind them and gave her the key. They stood there in the desolate room and she thought how amazing it was to see him there. But he had no eyes for the strangeness of the place. He seemed to have inherited it from her, the rites of hospitality with it and the authority to govern the interview.

"Will you sit down?" he said. "Give me your coat."

She shook her head, but did take one of the two chairs near the table, signing him to take the other. It seemed as if he would be less terrifying, sitting there where her father so often sat, than he was now standing over her, unmoved in his intention to get at that self she had not yet the strength to show him. But suddenly something signalled her. The room itself seemed to speak, as rooms

will when they have known even a desolate companionship and been left to a deeper desolation. This room spoke. While she thought she was occupied wholly with the tangible terror of coming inquisition, the room knocked on her inner mind.

"Wait," she said, though Brooke had not yet spoken. She listened. "I don't believe my father is here. Let me see."

She got up and went into the other room, leaving the door open behind her, and stood there, Brooke watching her and realising, with this snapping of the thread of his assertiveness, how tense he was and how uncertain of his next step. Andrea stood there and gazed about the room, never so bare as now, never, since they had moved into the place, in such order, for her father had evidently not occupied his bed at all the previous night and a litter of rubbish that might have been the by-product of his work had been swept to one side. On the table, ostentatiously alone, stood the case of an ordinary camera, and that she first glanced at, bent to look more closely, went to it, seized and lifted it. And then she gave a low cry that brought Brooke to her side.

"Look," she panted. "Look! she has taken it and left this in its place."

He took the case away from her, glanced at it casually and set it down.

"Didn't you see what she had in her hand when we met her?" Andrea asked him, in such intensity of breathless haste that he put his hand on her shoulder to steady her. She was trembling from head to foot and he drew forward the only chair in the room and signed her to sit down. But she shook her head impatiently.

"Pay attention," she said imperatively. "Put your mind on this. Didn't you see what she had?"

"Who?"

"Miss Bixby, when we met her."

"No," he said. "I didn't really look at her."

"She had a camera," said Andrea. "I saw it. I thought she'd been here to take pictures. She wanted to. She asked father. To advertise olympium. Publicity, that's what she said. It did look familiar — I knew it did then — only I didn't see why. You see, she took my father's away and left hers in its place."

"But," said Brooke, "she couldn't have been in here, if your father wasn't here to let her in. Unless he left her here and went out himself. Or unless she had a key."

Andrea struck her hands together.

"That's it," she said. "She had a key — your father's."

"My father's? What do you mean?"

"I can't tell you. Not now. You must go home. Ask your father if he has the latch key I gave him with the other one. And get my father's case away from her."

He might have thought she was making this turmoil to divert him from those unclarified issues she was so averse to meeting; but there was the testimony of her face. It was wild with alarm.

"After all," he ventured, "what's the odds really if she did carry away your father's camera? It's an accident. It can be set right."

"Open it," said Andrea, pushing the case toward him. "It isn't locked. Then you'll see."

He did open it, looked inside and said:

"What's the matter with it? It seems to be the usual thing."

"That's it," she returned sharply. "It's a camera and my father's was only a case, and we used it to hide his olympium in. When we travelled, he carried it in his

hand. He said there was no such hiding-place as in plain sight. If we were both going out, to leave the house alone, one of us took it along. To-day is the first time we failed to do it. I left my father here, and he went out. I suppose he forgot. He was tired. That's the way accidents happen. You get tired and you lose your grip."

Brooke looked at her sympathetically. She also was tired, he thought. Let her talk it out and presently her mind would swing back again to actualities. But suddenly and without warning his own mind reversed its attitude. All this, he saw, meant something real.

"Then," he said, though bewildered, "the thing for me to do is to get after Miss Bixby."

"Find her. Take it away from her," said Andrea, in the low tone of a most passionate appeal. "I must be here when my father comes. I can't let him bear it alone. I don't know what would happen to him. Oh, but you'll bring it back!"

Brooke nodded, snatched his cap and strode out and, when he reached the pavement, found himself tempted, so urgent was the compulsion of her anxiety, to break into a run. He, too, he thought, might reasonably be called hysterical. The fly had bitten him, and when one of his grandmother's friends, of the type known as dear old ladies, stopped him to pronounce a solemnly precise welcome home and feel his mental pulse on the topic of war, he was in a fever to get away from her. And when he managed it, with a short shrift that left her staring, he laughed a little, wondering if he were a fool to let Andrea infect him. For his mother had spoken of Miss Bixby in a hush of gratitude. When he entered the house his father and mother stood just within the doorway of the reception room, and it was evident that his mother had been crying. Her pink face looked blurred and her lip trembled.

Peter had his hand on her shoulder. Something had happened and she was being comforted. As Brooke approached them he saw his grandmother nearer the middle of the room. She stood there, her hand on the table, lightly supporting herself, and she looked both triumphant and satirically amused. Brooke halted, decidedly not wanting to involve his mother in a commotion over Miss Bixby. But the secretary's name was on her lips.

"We're a good deal upset." She turned slightly to include him in the circle of her confidence. "At least I am. Miss Bixby is leaving me."

"Then," said Brooke, the words leaping out before wiser second thought could interpose, "she was right."

"Who was right?" his mother asked.

But now he had himself in hand.

"Never mind, mum. Nothing much. Miss Bixby's leaving?"

"You can't imagine," Isabel said, pressing her handkerchief to her welling eyes, "what it means to me. It's simply cutting off — communication."

When Isabel cried, she was pathetic, not exasperating. She had none of those tricks of a distorted countenance whereby nature seems maliciously determined on irritating the onlooker into becoming the outspoken agent of a speedy drying up. The tears came welling quietly over her quivering face.

"Isabel," said Madam Brooke, indubitably triumphant in the background, "the woman never did you a better turn than taking it into her own hands and leaving you. You'd have had to dismiss her. It was only a question of time."

"There, there!" said Peter, in a warning undertone meant for the old lady's gentling, "never mind now."

"I should never have dismissed her," said Isabel, in a

passion so foreign to her that Peter and Brooke started in what seemed to the old lady a comical terror. "How strange it is none of you can understand! When I lose her, I lose my one reliable means of reaching Phil. It's as terrible on his side as on mine."

"Well, dear," said Peter, in a temporising compassion he took at its own value and helplessly despised, "it isn't as if she were the only one doing this kind of thing."

"She's the only one," said Isabel, "who does it satisfactorily. She's so clear, she's so strong on facts. There never was anything like her."

"That," said Madam Brooke relentlessly, "is because she knew how to piece out her witchcraft with listening and jumping at conclusions. You might as well be told — no, Peter, you needn't make faces at me — you might as well be told I set a trap for her and she fell into it."

"Then," said Isabel, her anger so funnily inflating her that she looked like an enraged bird, every feather at unhappy odds with all the rest, "that's why she's leaving."

"No, it isn't either," said Madam Brooke, with an air of expertly pricking a bubble and knowing nobody could puncture it with such well-timed neatness. "She didn't know anything about it. That was all her pull on the other world amounted to. It was about the clumsiest trap ever set for an artful dodger, but my lady walked straight into it. And she never knew she was in. You needn't grin at me, Brooke. I'm not long on metaphor, as you'd say, but never mind. That's how it was."

Isabel, looking portentously dignified, drew herself up.

"Then, mother," she remarked, with an icy remoteness Peter felt down his backbone, "if you laid plans to disgrace a secretary as valuable as Miss Bixby is to me, it was an exceedingly unladylike thing to do."

"Good for you, Isabel, good for you," said Madam Brooke. "You're a regular little fighting cock."

She laughed in untinged amusement at the richness of it, but Peter was profoundly discomfited.

"My dear," he said. "Isabel! Mother, really now! don't you see what we're doing? we're having a row. I don't believe such a thing ever — "

"No, it never did," said Madam Brooke, leaving her place by the table and making her softly rustling way to the door. "It never did happen in this house, and it never would in any house that had you for the head of it, Peter. Isabel, I'm terribly sorry, but I can't take it back. The girl's a fraud — more than half fraud any way — and I did tole her into a trap. You sit down with Peter and Brooke and have a nice long talk about Phil. That's better than your messages."

She passed Brooke with a touch on the hand possibly reminding him that now was his time to press into the darkened void in his mother's heart and recall himself to her by establishing their oneness of grief over Phil. But either he did not understand or the urgency of the moment was more immediate to him, for, as his father and mother turned back into the reception room and sat down together, he ran up the stairs after grandmother and followed her into her own room. She knew he was coming, but she did not halt until they were inside the doorway and then he saw how white and worn she was, how forlornly discouraged, as if old age had stolen upon her in the last few minutes, after her gallant stand, and forbidden her such brave fighting.

"Sit down, dear," he said. "Let me get you some grog."

She did sit down in an arm-chair that somehow seemed to enthrone her fragile dignity and put out a trembling

hand. He took the thin old hand and held it close, with an unformulated desire to give her somehow a portion of his own vital life and the warmth of his blood. Presently she smiled at him wanly.

"Your mother," she said, "is very naughty. You'll have patience with her, won't you?"

"Patience!" he repeated. "With mum? Well, I should say! And after all," he betrayed, "Phil was a hundred per cent more of a fellow than I ever was. No wonder —"

There he paused, seeing suddenly where his hurt affection was leading him; but he had given her her chance.

"No, dear," said she. You wouldn't have known this was the voice that could thrill with scorn and satire. "Phil wasn't any nearer to her than you. It's the one that was taken that's blotted out everybody else. If it had been you it would have been just the same. She's got a mania. She's determined to hear from Phil. She's lost her balance. Your mother never was an intellectual woman and she's got to be careful. We've got to be careful of her, or we shall find her more changed than she is now."

She sat there, not looking at him, and he was thankful to her. He knew the red had run into his face, it was so hot, and his eyes burned. But grandmother didn't propose seeing that, though she was so wise she must have known it. He carried the old hand to his lips and kissed it, and kept on holding it while he leaped to the business in hand, that he ought not, he knew, to have deferred for even this assuaging minute.

"When is she going?" he asked. "Miss Bixby."

She thought he was shunting her to a ground less personal to him, and she was willing. She respected the boy's dear shynesses.

"At once," she answered, and drew her hand from his. They had to get back into the beaten tracks of custom. It had to be so with people who lived together. "That is, sometime this afternoon."

"Then," he said, "it's my impression she must be stopped."

He broke into the tale of the stolen olympium and Andrea's belief that Miss Bixby had taken a key entrusted to his father and exchanged the two cases, one with its camera, the other containing the olympium. Madam Brooke watched him, her eyes narrowed, her head up, almost, he thought once, her nostrils widened to scent the trail.

"Now I'm telling it," he said, when he had ended, "it seems a rotten sort of yarn. Perhaps Andrea's gone dotty with all she's been through. Sounds pretty fantastic, doesn't it? Tell me what you really think."

"No," said the old lady, at once. "It isn't at all fantastic. When folks begin to play the devil it always seems a little queer, especially if it comes to you in a room like this with innocent white curtains and a fire on the hearth. But if you found another camera there, I wish you'd taken it along and we could have plumped it at her and told her she'd gone off with the wrong one. Nothing like a finished society manner in these things, — behaving like a perfect lady."

"I wish I had," said Brooke. "But I didn't. What can I do now? Go to her room and ask her if she's pinched a case full of olympium? Good Lord, grannie! I don't know whether there ever was any olympium. And if there was I shouldn't recognize the stuff. She could pass me a tube of tooth paste and say, 'Here it is. Sorry I made off with it,' and I shouldn't be the wiser. I should have to say, 'Thanks. That's all right.'"

Madam Brooke, with a ready alertness, rose from her chair.

"You can't do anything," she said. "You can't go to her room and paw over her things. Your father couldn't. Your mother never'd forgive either of you. And you can't call in the police. You run down and get your mother started telling you about automatic writing and I'll beard the Bixby in her den. If I holler you come up. No, I won't holler. That would fetch your mother, too. I'll crow like a rooster. Don't you know how you boys used to keep me at it till I scraped my throat raw? If you hear that, you leg it. You'll know Bixby's got me down, sitting on my chest."

Brooke, in spite of his certainty that things were fantastically wrong, broke into a laugh. Madam Brooke, a queer little smile twisting her mouth, gathered up a frosty looking white shawl from the sofa and adjusted it about her shoulders.

"Bixby is one of those hardy perennials that like a cold room," said she. "I know that as well as if I'd felt it. Hurry up. Run downstairs to your mother and keep her there. But if I crow, you come."

Brooke, not half believing any efficient system of action was open to her and yet hopefully knowing she would stick at nothing, stood there while she went out of the room, turning at the door to give him a nod of reassurance and the broken end of the queer smile. Then he heard her rustling up the next flight of stairs, her tap at Miss Bixby's door and her voice:

"May I come in?"

He thought she spoke with a significant loudness, to assure him she was carrying out her side of the bargain. And not at all easy in his own part, he went downstairs to find his mother. Of that one thing he was sure. How-

ever much or little reality might be in it, she must not be allowed to join this grotesque mummery. Mother was not, in these strange days, to be trusted. She might break out, and Isabel mentally on the loose was something he could not prefigure.

XIX

MADAM BROOKE stopped at Miss Bixby's door and listened. There were sounds within, irregular sounds, at intervals, of some one moving about, stopping now and then, it might be to fold articles and dispose of them. Miss Bixby was there and she was packing. Then Madam Brooke knocked and, when the door was opened, as it was almost immediately, put her request:

"May I come in?"

Miss Bixby stood before her, a reduced figure in the undress for exacting deeds that owes nothing to a beguiling negligée. She was in her stout black petticoat, a towel about her hair, emphasizing her precautionary neatness. Seeing her thus shorn of her uniform of the exquisite cuffs and collar and the irreproachable plainness of her dress, Madam Brooke felt the certainty of having the whip-hand. No woman could, she believed, carry out a hostile encounter creditably in such a petticoat. Miss Bixby was taken aback. There could be no doubt about that. Madam Brooke had never come to her door before. Perhaps no member of the family ever had. The perfect order of the room, hardly infringed upon now by neat piles of clothing that lay about on the table and chairs, might have been her own shell for all the invasion that had ever troubled it.

"I'm sorry, Madam Brooke," she declared. "I'm in such confusion."

"Never mind," said Madam Brooke, smiling at her a social smile, the one she kept for calls and teas of the variety that made her face ache when it was used too long consecutively. "I won't keep you." Which was a lie, she knew, for she meant to keep her precisely as long as she liked. She gave the door the very least pressure against Miss Bixby's repressive hand and stepped in, slight as the space was for her soft slenderness. "No, I won't sit down." Though indeed Miss Bixby had not asked her to. "You're packing, I see. When do you leave?"

"I leave this afternoon," said Miss Bixby. There was a rasp in her voice, of nervousness, of irritation, it was impossible for the listener to tell which. "And really, Madam Brooke, I'm very busy."

Madam Brooke, the chairs being occupied, perched on the end of a couch, also burdened, at the other end, by books and clothing. She was aware, in the under part of her mind, of a little chorus of comment on these things she saw before her in the exactitude of their order. "Poor devil!" the chorus was chanting, though not in any way to interrupt the business at hand, "how can she expect to sleep the sleep of natural woman in a nightie like that?" It was before her, topping the pile, unrelieved garments of stout cloth warranted to wear. But to Miss Bixby, she remarked:

"I wanted to remind you to leave Miss Dove's key. I'll take it now, if you please."

The slightest possible flicker ran over Miss Bixby's face.

"My latch key, Madam Brooke?" she asked. "Surely I will leave it. I never for a moment thought of not doing so."

"Not the key to this house," said Madam Brooke. "Miss Dove's house."

"I have no key to Miss Dove's house," said she, and

her brows contracted slightly. She moistened her lips. "Why should you think I had a key to Miss Dove's house?"

"I assumed that," said Madam Brooke frankly. "I guessed at it. I knew you had been in there when no one was at home, and I assumed you took the key she left with Mr. Harvey. However, that's immaterial. I merely thought I'd begin with the key. Miss Bixby, if you will kindly give me Mr. Dove's camera I will see that you have yours. No questions asked, you know. Simply give me the camera."

Now Miss Bixby laughed, whole-heartedly and with relief.

"Madam Brooke," said she, "I haven't Mr. Dove's camera nor anything that is his. And really you are delaying me a lot about my packing. I hate to say so, but you are, you know."

"Then," said Madam Brooke, musing, "if it's not here what have you done with it?"

Miss Bixby did not answer. Madam Brooke rose and the two stood looking at each other, the older woman reflective, Miss Bixby with the light of something growingly confident in her gaze. It looked to her antagonist as if she had suddenly begun to feel herself on top.

"No," said Madam Brooke, "you act as if you were telling the truth. It may not be here. But if it isn't, where is it?"

She began to look about the room as if she inventoried its orderly disorder. There were the piles of clothing, the books, Miss Bixby's hat and jacket on a chair by the desk, her little hand-bag on the desk itself; and Madam Brooke absently reflected that she must have been indeed hurried, with all her methodical ways, not to have hung up her coat when she came in.

"I'm sorry," said she. "It'll be an awful job, but I shall have to go through your things."

"Go through my things?" echoed Miss Bixby. A round red spot had come into each cheek, and Madam Brooke, observing it, approved. She was glad the irreproachable creature had some blood in her. "Go through my things?" she repeated. "I'll call the police."

"Do," said Madam Brooke, with an air of cheerful relief. "It's a job I don't hanker for. They'll help me."

Miss Bixby stood for an instant in silence while Madam Brooke, shaking her head as if she hated the prospect, gave her a glance of apology emphasised by anxious brows, lifted a pile of clothing from a chair and looked under it. Miss Bixby, after that one pause, evidently threw something to the winds, her professional manner, her prudence or her recognition of an antagonist it was not wisdom to defy. She started forward.

"Madam Brooke," said she, "you just put down my underclothes. Madam Brooke, I won't have it. I shall — I shall touch you."

The last she said breathlessly, but she meant it in all its imaginable entirety. It was a good deal of a threat, and was candidly meant to be. Madam Brooke stood looking at her a moment, considering, it was evident, ways and means. Then she stepped to the door, put her head out, meantime leaving the rest of her slight person in the room in order that the impulse of a push might not force her into the corridor, and crowed, loud and clear. It was a pity she could not, listening as she did after the crow, have seen Miss Bixby's face. It was moved by a deep perplexity and concern. Miss Bixby plainly thought the old lady had lost her wits and was mentally preparing to deal with her now from that angle of psychology.

"Ah!" breathed Madam Brooke.

She heard her grandson running up the stairs. And when he had reached the second floor he, too, heard something arresting, as Madam Brooke did. It was his mother from below.

"Brooke," she called, "is that your grandmother crowing?"

This enlightened Miss Bixby to the point of allowing her to shift her psychology to the angle prescribed for attacking the technically sane. Evidently that crow was part of the family tradition. It had been heard before. Madam Brooke listened. Brooke paused a moment before answering.

"Yes," he responded then, "same old performance, request programme."

Madam Brooke was smiling at that when he confronted her after his run up the second flight.

"I couldn't have her coming up," he explained, "to see what the matter was. I wonder she asked. She knows your crow."

"Brooke," said his grandmother, "I find myself obliged to look over Miss Bixby's things. I want you" — she was about to add, "I want you to come in and stand by me while I do it." But a vision of the austere piles of clothing rose before her and she simply couldn't say that. Should she, a woman merciful in some degree, admit a man, and a young man, into the privacies of Miss Bixby's unadorned life? "You stay here," she said, "just outside the door. Don't let anybody go out or come in. And if I call you, come."

The latter she said, with a purpose, loudly enough for Miss Bixby's ears, lest there lingered in that enraged mind the unformulated purpose of touching her. Brooke did not like his job. That was plain, and yet it was also plain, his grandmother reflected, that he would like it

still less if he crossed the sill and guessed from the telltale confusion within what course her own activities would have to take.

"I don't fancy this," he said. "I wish you'd keep out of it and let me — let things take the usual course."

By which she understood that he meant the usual course when something had presumably been stolen. In that case you called in the police and refrained from undertaking possibly unjustifiable courses yourself. But she foresaw her way, and she was also perfectly aware that her own obstinacy of purpose was too well known in the household to need more than simple reiteration.

"I know what I'm doing," she said. "You let me alone and just hang about outside there. And if your mother comes, cut away and don't let her see you. You can run up to the attic and let her find you rummaging old magazines." She was about turning back to her task when a second thought arrested her. "On the whole," she said, "we'd better be locked in, Miss Bixby and I. You take the key" — she drew it from the lock and passed it out to him — "and lock us in. Then if your mother comes you can be safely up attic, and if she knocks, Miss Bixby and I'll keep still and there won't be any fuss."

Brooke looked his aversion to locking the door even, but she thrust the key into his unwilling fingers and, like other great commanders, not pausing to see her orders carried out, shut the door. At the same instant she heard behind her a rattle of what might have been falling particles and she did start and look over her shoulder with an answering quickness that told her how apprehensive she really was. The next instant she was smiling at her unstable nerves. What would Miss Bixby be likely to do to her here in plain daylight with Brooke outside the door? And Miss Bixby, though glowering, did not look

in any lurid sense dangerous. There she stood, her back to the fireplace, that most commanding vantage point in any room, her arms folded, her face dark red. Madam Brooke was not, she told herself, in the least afraid of Miss Bixby, yet underneath the ordered forces of her mind quivered an excited sense that something not to be predicated would happen if the woman did carry out that vague threat of touching her, and she was quite aware of her state as a frail old lady unused to being jostled. Then, after this slight pause, perhaps emphasising his dislike of doing it, she heard Brooke lock the door. The sound itself, testifying to something done, brought her a breath of relief, and she found herself ready for Miss Bixby who, ready apparently for her, cut in on the old system of getting her blow in first.

"If anybody knocks, you and I'll keep still, will we?" she inquired, in a smothered voice of such intensity that it sounded, Madam Brooke thought, exactly as her face looked. The face was mahogany red and so was the voice. "You needn't think I shall keep still. I'll scream my head off."

"Then," said Madam Brooke composedly, "you'll be a silly girl. You heard what my grandson said. He objected to my going on with this. He preferred the usual way. You know what the usual way is. The police. Do you want the police muddling over your things? And when you've called 'em in, it isn't so easy to get rid of 'em. Police means the law, and the law is a great automatic dragon made to snap your head off in the end. You'd far better trust yourself to a sensible old woman like me who'll just go round lifting up your nighties to see what's under 'em."

And she was actually proceeding from chair to chair investigating the piles of garments, shaking them out and

refolding them with the utmost nicety. Miss Bixby made no answer, but her face, Madam Brooke saw, as she lifted her head for a glance at her, did not pale by a shade. Madam Brooke was sorry for that. She was honestly concerned for fear the girl would have what she called a rush of blood to the head. Suddenly she straightened and looked at Miss Bixby in a community of interest.

"This isn't efficiency," said she. "It was those Germans, wasn't it, that were always talking about efficiency? Well, there's something in it, after all, though I fancy you can carry it too far. How silly it is for me to go round handling your clothes over, when you've got to pack 'em in the end. Here! you let me pass 'em to you as I examine 'em and you put 'em into the trunk."

"Madam Brooke," said Miss Bixby violently, "I will not allow you to meddle with my packing. I simply will not allow it."

"Nonsense!" said Madam Brooke. "I never should have suspected you'd be such a silly girl. You were as calm as a bureau or a school desk. Now let's begin methodically. What do you want in first? the books? I don't believe I need to shake those. You couldn't hide a couple of thimblefuls of the stuff they've lost in a book, now could you? Not that I know how the thing looks. I suppose you do. Here, take these."

She was, with a charming smile, proffering Miss Bixby a pile of books lifted from the floor. Miss Bixby, her arms rigidly folded, refused to take them. Madam Brooke, standing before her, the books held at arm's length, her slender hands trembling upon them, gave a little head-shake of discouragement and then proceeded herself to put them into the trunk. She did it rapidly and with great accuracy of care. It was beautiful packing, Miss Bixby unwillingly realised, as she watched her

in a scornful repudiation she hoped Madam Brooke would look up and see. Madam Brooke did not look up. She continued her task deftly, and yet with a subtile implication of its being too much for her which Miss Bixby could have wept over, it was so odious. When the books were in, a layer of them, Madam Brooke looked about her, considering.

"Now," she said, "the shoes. I believe they come next, though it's so many years since I've packed I've forgotten some of the tricks. It's amazing how useless an old woman gets to be with everybody running to pad her against the sharp corners. And if I'd realised I was to pack for you, I could have had the trunk set up on something. This stooping is the dickens and all."

She was peering into the shoes, taking out their trees and, with an exaggerated difficulty, putting them back again; Miss Bixby's serviceable calf boots they were, and the girl could have wept anew to see them in those delicate hands. And Madam Brooke, as if doubtful whether she had performed her task thoroughly, took out the trees again, turned the boots sole upward and shook them vigorously. At this point Miss Bixby could not have been sure she might not have wept at all the various stages of the scene. Perhaps her trained professional decorum was left her unmarred. Perhaps she had enough appreciation of the difference in plumage of an old lady who rustled about in soft silks and of herself tramping in what is known poetically as frieze. The age-long frenzies over the inequalities of life that are responsible, more than individual oppressions, for what is known as class hatred, embittered her. But at any rate, without being conscious of anything beyond a helpless admiration for Madam Brooke, her address, her practical capabilities, Miss Bixby had a moment now of wishing her unconscious, palsied or

plainly dead. It is not so culpable to wish a devilishly active enemy dead as might be supposed. The exasperated sufferer from that enemy's activities is merely seizing the last weapon left him in the psychological armory, and he isn't solemnly consigning his tormentor to the dread ordeal of a theological judgment. He merely means he wishes he were once and for all — and absolutely for the general good — blotted out as an active force of exasperation.

"Do you wrap up your shoes?" Madam Brooke was asking practically. "Shoe bags or anything? I have little squares all over roses as bright as I can get. When you're not supposed to so much as dip your finger into the dye pot any more, because you're old, it's a great temptation to paint everything up like cockatoos. Perhaps I'd better use a bit of paper. I hate to have them touch the books."

She looked at Miss Bixby brightly, in a waiting deliberation that seemed to demand even the smallest shade of sympathetic interest in return. But Miss Bixby did not answer.

"Ah," said Madam Brooke, "now I've got the cart before the horse. Here is a pair without trees. And there are the trees on that chair by you. Hand them to me, like a good girl."

Still Miss Bixby stood immovable. Still her face was set in its mahogany calm. Madam Brooke gave a little sigh of gentle discouragement.

"Well, well," she said, "you certainly are a naughty girl, aren't you? When you sat down there at that table writing out headlines from the kingdom of heaven who'd have thought — "

She put down the shoes as if it hurt her to do it, crossed the room as if that also hurt, took up the trees, came back

and inserted them in the shoes with an amount of difficulty Miss Bixby saw through completely. It hadn't been difficult to cross the room, it hadn't been in the least a complicated task to insert the shoe trees in the shoes. The old lady was acting, and acting to impress her, playing old age for all it was worth to break down her adversary's guard. It was simply another way of fighting and Miss Bixby knew it, and yet her guard was broken and she had to yield.

"Oh," she said, in a voice that defied her and shook with every syllable, "I wouldn't treat anybody so—there isn't a person in the world I hate enough to treat 'em as you're treating me. Here! give me those things. If you've got to shake 'em, I'll fold 'em and put 'em in."

Madam Brooke accorded her an approving smile.

"That's a good girl," said she. "Now we shall get on."

So they packed together, Madam Brooke apparently absorbed in her task and Miss Bixby silently weeping. Having begun, it seemed as if she couldn't stop, though she caught a great breath, from time to time, with an effort of drawing back a fist to have at her emotion. Madam Brooke, glancing at her once and asking if she didn't think a jacket she was painfully shaking would keep its shape better if it had some crumpled paper in the sleeves, thought she had never seen anybody make such hard work of crying as Miss Bixby. Her face contracted into lines it was horror to look upon. She pressed her lips together until they got away from her and snarled up into hideous contours, she shut her eyes and the tears somehow got through. It was a crumbled aqueduct of emotion, and Madam Brooke came to the conclusion that the girl, immured in the necessities of her exacting life, had never, perhaps, since she was a child, felt at liberty to cry and this was the raging of a liberated flood.

"It almost seems," said Madam Brooke persuasively, at one point, "as if we'd got pretty nearly done and we haven't come on what we're hunting for."

At this Miss Bixby bit her lip with an unthinking savagery that squeezed out of her an "Oh!" of pain. The situation was the more unbearable in that they were not now flashing back the demand and rebuff of declared enemies. Here they were packing in apparent amity and Madam Brooke was pleasantly implying their joint interest in finding the concealed case. Suddenly she stopped, this terrible old lady, holding a shepherd's plaid waist before her like a cuirass, and, inadvertently though she did it, it seemed to Miss Bixby that it was a part of her astute hatefulness to hold it so that the unbound seams within were shamefully visible. It was an unworthy waist, made by Miss Bixby to wear in her room to save her secretarial uniform, and here it confronted her to loose a deeper depth in the fount of tears. How could you expect a woman who had made such a waist and furthermore worn it, to endure the interrogation of a woman in violet silk? There they stood, the symbolic plaid insignia of their differences between them, the ragged seams turned cruelly to the light.

"Well," said Madam Brooke, "we've got the trunk almost packed, haven't we, and we haven't found anything after all. What shall we try next?"

"We!" Miss Bixby wanted to cry explosively, to knock some appreciation of the monstrosity of it all into the old lady's head with the sheer satiric weight of the word. But when she would have hurled it forth, her mouth curled up again in continued weeping and the salt flood wet her lips.

"You see," said Madam Brooke, "I shouldn't have gone to the trouble of shaking all these things if I hadn't

thought the stuff might have been taken out of the case and the case thrown away. They do that in books, you know. It would be a shame, now wouldn't it, if I'd read so many detective stories for nothing? If I only knew how the stuff looks! it might be dry and you put it into envelopes, or it might be a paste and you packed it in cold cream jars. How the dickens does the thing look? I rather think I've got to go over your toilet articles. What do you say?"

What did she say? Miss Bixby choked upon that. She had a wild suspicion that she'd got to hold on to herself or Madam Brooke would have her hypnotised into assuming they were allies in a common cause. Suddenly something queer in the old lady's face struck her with an alarm that dried her tears on the very instant, leaving nothing behind them but an occasional sobbing breath. Madam Brooke, who had been holding the symbolic waist absent-mindedly before her, lowered her hands, mechanically folded it and laid it on a chair.

"I believe," she said, "I am a born fool. Anybody'd say if my detective stories hadn't done me any more good than this I might as well have been reading the Psalms."

She crossed the room with a light tread, not at all the tread of an old lady trying to prove by illustration how unable she was, from sheer physical frailty, to pack a trunk, and thrust her hand up the chimney. Miss Bixby, who had turned with her, gave a little smothered exclamation, clenched her hands at her sides and bade herself stand still. From the intensity of her face it might have been said she was praying for something and praying hard.

"No," said Madam Brooke to herself, "no! But that's what they'd do."

She felt along the ledge of bricks, and her hand brought

down a little shower of hardened soot. Her face lighted and she glanced back at Miss Bixby in a child's ingenuous delight.

"That's the same sound," she said, "the very sound I heard when I was talking with Brooke at the door. And when I turned to look, two or three of these little pellets rolled across the hearth. Oh, we're warm, we're decidedly warm."

Miss Bixby looked, at that moment, as if she found the praying formula inadequate. But she was not entirely without hope, not until Madam Brooke's hand stopped and her slim shoulders began trembling. She gave a little shrill cry and brought out, in her blackened hand, a bag. Now she was shaking all over and laughing in an excited triumph.

"Didn't I tell you?" she cried. "They always put it up the chimney. They put the revolver there and the stolen gems. What a fool we were not to look there first."

The implied community of interest was again too much for Miss Bixby. "We!" her lips rounded to say, and this time they managed it. Madam Brooke was gazing at the bag.

"But bless me!" she cried, in a naïve astonishment, "it's not a case. It's your hand-bag." Her voice mounted until it was a needle-fine note of shrill interrogation. "That bag was lying on the desk when I came into this room. And I hadn't noticed it was gone. It was only just now I happened to think how the rubble fell down the chimney when I stood there at the door. But of course you threw away the case, didn't you? You put the stuff into your bag. Let's open it and see how their olympium looks."

She sat down in a chair by the hearth and had her fingers at the clasp when Miss Bixby made a little rush

across the room and stopped beside her. She bent over her and Madam Brooke, inwardly persuaded that she was about to snatch the bag, ceased trying to move the fastening and put both hands on it, pressing it down upon her knees. But Miss Bixby, who had never lost the consciousness of Brooke outside the door, had only bent to speak into her ear. She could not hope Brooke had gone away, although at some moments it was so still she almost believed he had. And now, if Madam Brooke could be made to understand how dangerous it was to brave a woman beyond the limits of her endurance, she would try, for both their sakes to make her. For Miss Bixby was frightened, not so much at the prospect of accusations and punishment as at the unleashed possibilities she felt stirring within herself. She was so angry that she was afraid of her own anger. It looked to her, at that last moment, like a creature, a demon, that had escaped from her control and might do ungoverned things.

"Madam Brooke," she said, her voice at the old lady's ear, the low menace of it so arresting that Madam Brooke turned her head to look at her. "Madam Brooke!"

There they were, their faces close, gazing into each other's eyes, Miss Bixby afraid of her demon and Madam Brooke, though she was gravely aware of some unformulated danger, at last afraid of nothing. But she too had seen Miss Bixby's demon, and she gave it no chance to strike first. She gathered her stiff muscles for a concerted movement, sprang out of the chair and stood in front of the fireplace, her eyes upon Miss Bixby's.

"Brooke!" she called, in a calm, carrying voice. "Are you there?"

She had her one moment of nauseating recoil as it occurred to her that he might not be there. He might not have heard her, he might have walked to the end of the

hall. And in the moment that would pass before she could call louder, there was Miss Bixby's demon. But the voice came, close by the door, a little anxious, but above all steady.

"All right. Want me?"

At the instant, it seemed to Madam Brooke she must yield to the sob that leaped to her throat. But she kept it there. If Miss Bixby got wind of the sob, it must have appeared to her a muscular convulsion only. And Miss Bixby groaned, a long moan like a creature in pain. Her demon was going, exorcised by the voice. And after the physical anguish of the demon's coming, his dominance over her own nerves and muscles, he had hurt nobody but her.

"No, Brooke," the old lady called, in a voice as steady as his own. "Not yet. Be on hand. When I tell you, come." Then she turned to Miss Bixby. She spoke to her as the cruelly kind speak to the hysterical. "Get hold of yourself. You look a perfect sight. Sit down in that chair, and don't speak another syllable while I open the bag."

XX

Miss Bixby sank into the chair. Her demon had left her faint and ill. It was cloudy before her eyes and she felt the nausea of an outraged solar plexus. The sensation was so foreign to her that she acquiesced in it and sat staring blankly. Madam Brooke also sat.

"Now," said she, with the cheerfulness, Miss Bixby drearily thought, of the person who has got his own way, "let's see what we have here." She opened the bag, stretched it to its full capacity and looked. "A handkerchief," said she, in rising dismay. "A purse. Eyeglasses. Nothing else. Not a single thing. Well, I am —" What she was she, stopping in utter blankness, left the onlooker to imagine.

Miss Bixby, with luck coming her way, felt herself recovering. Her blood seemed to resume its normal course and the mist cleared from before her eyes.

"Now," said she, in a voice she managed to stiffen into its accustomed dry adequacy, "perhaps you'll be kind enough to shut my bag and give it back to me."

Madam Brooke did partially shut it, only omitting to complete the act by snapping the clasp. She sat looking blankly before her, once or twice, by a movement of the eyes, including Miss Bixby in her field of vision, her forehead taut with concentration. Now, from a growing intentness, she regarded Miss Bixby alone. Miss Bixby wouldn't, she began to believe, show quite so eager a revival of interest in the occasion if it didn't mean some-

thing significant to her to get the bag back into her own hands.

"And," said Madam Brooke thoughtfully, "there isn't the leastest mite of a thing here that looks like any of their laboratory stuff. Yet I do feel warm."

Miss Bixby, watching her, was more and more palpably coming to life. She was eager now. A light had come into her black eyes. She was not only in suspense; her eagerness was consuming her.

"There's one thing," said Madam Brooke reflectively, still watching her to see how she took the mounting stages of this fumbling supposition. "The key, — the key you stole from Mrs. Harvey's drawer. That isn't important, only we might as well know where that key is. If you've got it, as we think, at least it'll prove you've been where you might have taken the other thing. We might as well — "

She opened the bag again to its full capacity and turned it over in her lap. Miss Bixby, with a little exasperated cry, was upon her, crouching at her feet, her hands upon the small confusion of articles released. But though she was the stronger, Madam Brooke was quicker-witted. She sprang to her feet and allowed the things to fall in confusion to the floor, and when they separated there, to roll on their individual ways, stooped like a flash and picked up the purse because Miss Bixby, over-balanced for a moment, also lunged for it. Madam Brooke backed with it to the door, and then she spoke so tartly that Miss Bixby, miserably collecting the disorder of things on the rug, stopped in the act and stared at her.

"I should think," said Madam Brooke, "you'd know better than to make a woman of my age snap round like this and strain her muscles to fiddle strings. Now I've got it and I shall examine it and you can see me do it."

She opened the purse, a square wallet of black pebbled leather, and glanced first into the little pocket at the side. That would be the logical place for a key. There was nothing there. She stopped short with a comical air of complete dismay that would have made an onlooker less sore beset than Miss Bixby shout with laughter. She herself laughed.

"You baggage," said she, "you're a clever one, or else I'm not so clever as I thought. You're a regular magpie for hiding, aren't you? You're better than any detective story, standing there looking like a tomb."

To Miss Bixby, facing her unmoved, she seemed to be enjoying the situation with such open-minded hilarity that the secretary hated her with a rush of energy foreign to her ordered emotions.

"Perhaps," said she, with acidity, "you might give me back my purse."

"One moment," said Madam Brooke. "Then I will. And with apologies. Here's this little flap." She turned it back and drew out two pieces of cardboard. The significance of them together there flashed upon her instantly and she gave a little hoot of triumph. "A ticket to New York. A parcel room check, South Station. I know it is, for I left a parcel there myself not ten days ago. I needn't die yet," cried the old lady. "I am as clever as anybody need to be."

"If you think," said Miss Bixby, now regarding her with a perfect composure, "it's clever to recognise a railroad ticket and a parcel room check, you're easily satisfied."

"I know the whole business," said Madam Brooke. "I see exactly what you did after you left the Doves' with the case. You cut over to the South Station and checked the thing, and being there you bought your ticket,

for fear you'd have to leave here in a rush. And you didn't mean to have that chemical stuff in your possession an instant till you left town for good. I don't know how you did it and got back here so quickly, but that's immaterial. Why, you took taxis. Of course you did." She raised her voice. "Brooke, open the door."

He did instantly. It might have been fancied that his hand was uneasily upon the key.

"I want you," said Madam Brooke, meeting him in the doorway, "to take this check, go to the parcel room in the South Station and get the article left there. And bring it here to me."

Brooke took the check, but he was frowning. Miss Bixby, who had approached the door, was making appealing signs to him behind his grandmother's back. He read the sodden misery of the girl's face and wondered whether he ought to be ashamed of himself or even ashamed of grandmother.

"Lieutenant Harvey," Miss Bixby broke out, in a gulp of emotion, "that check is mine. It represents property. You have no more right to lay hands on it than you have to come in here and take things out of my trunk, or than she has to snatch my purse. She's got my purse. There it is in her hand. Give me back my property, Lieutenant Harvey."

He hesitated, convinced now that he was ashamed of himself and aghast at the uncontrollable force he knew as grandmother. But grandmother gave him a little mandatory push on the arm and took the key from the door.

"Here's your purse," she said, thrusting it at Miss Bixby with the other hand. "Do as I tell you, Brooke. You'll find the thing checked at the station is Mr. Dove's olympium. If you don't, I'll go to the Psychopathic and have my head renovated. Cut along." She shut the

door on him, turned the key and faced Miss Bixby with a cheerful smile. "Now," said she, "let's sit down and talk it over. I'm all of a tremble, aren't you?"

She did sit down and drew a footstool toward her, putting up her neat feet to rest them comfortably. Miss Bixby glared at the feet an instant as if she were cursing them. In a sense she was, for she was remembering the stout calf boots at the bottom of the trunk laid there symmetrically by these delicate old hands that were now clasped, yet trembling a little, in Madam Brooke's violet silk lap. There was some satisfaction to Miss Bixby in making sure, by a keener glance, that they did tremble. At least, even if this terrible old lady was on top, she had not got there without some wear and tear of her precious old self. Miss Bixby felt as if she must burst with the disordered force of her own emotions. Yet she could not cry. She had cried herself out, and it had been so anguished an experience that she knew she must guard herself desperately against ever doing it again. She decided that no satiric gibe or cool command of the old lady should induce her to speak, so long as they remained together in this room; but her lips opened, without her volition, and she heard herself saying, in a passionate monotone:

"It isn't fair. It isn't fair."

And the exasperating old lady understood. She had followed Miss Bixby's glance from her daintily shod feet to the cognisance of those stout shoes in the trunk, an unerring trail. And she said softly:

"Why, the shoes are nice, you know. You could have slippers, too, if you wanted them."

Perhaps her uncanny understanding enraged Miss Bixby more than the matter at issue.

"No, I couldn't either," she said violently. "You know I couldn't. Where could I wear 'em? I'm on call

every minute of the day, indoors and then out. You know I am. And I've got to lay by something, haven't I? and there's my insurance, too."

"Dear me! dear me!" said the old lady. "Is everybody underpaid? Is that it? You're underpaid?"

"No, I'm not," said Miss Bixby belligerently. "I'm overpaid, if anything. But when you're in business you work every minute, if there's anything to you. You don't have to, but you do, you know. And there's no time left for slippers and things. I should think you could understand that."

"I thought," said Madam Brooke mildly, "that all young women nowadays had rather nice clothes. Sometimes I wish they hadn't. They make me uneasy. These reformers, you know, the ones that read papers in parlors, they tell us girls have got to have frillies or they'll stop being good. I don't believe it myself. I think a good girl would rather walk round in gunny-bags, whatever they are, or die in 'em. But the talk does make me uneasy."

"You needn't be uneasy about me," said Miss Bixby acridly. "I'm good enough. Nobody wants me to be anything else. But I dare say I should be, anyway."

Madam Brooke shook her head.

"No, my dear," she said. "You're not any too good, —that is if it proves you did steal the old professor's peroxide, or whatever it is. No, you're not conspicuously good. As Brooke would say, 'not so you'd notice it.' But now Brooke has gone to get the stuff and we're so cosy here, talking it over, why not tell me about the key? Not in the least important, you know, only I'm curious as a cat. I suppose you did just help yourself to it, out of the table drawer?"

"Yes," said Miss Bixby, "I did. Miss Dove was here

and I thought I might as well step in and get some pictures of the room."

Madam Brooke fixed upon her a gaze unrelenting and yet impersonal. She had no animus against Miss Bixby, but she did not propose letting her off without setting her motives in as rigorous order as the contents of the trunk.

"Then," said she, "why didn't you go to the door like a Christian and ask?"

"Because," Miss Bixby answered indifferently, "he'd as good as turned me out of the house."

"Oh! you'd some reason for thinking he was away."

"No. I didn't think he was away. But I knew if I walked in on him I could say I found a key in the lock. He isn't here on this earth, anyway. He's up in the clouds."

Madam Brooke felt she was getting somewhere now. She liked this picking her steps along a half blazed trail.

"And how," she pursued, "did you know the stuff was in that case?"

Miss Bixby smiled a little. This was a fact not likely to be so palatable, and she delivered it with a demure relish of her own.

"Mrs. Harvey told me."

It found its mark. Madam Brooke, palpably hit, repeated doubtfully:

"Mrs. Harvey told you?"

"Yes. She got it from Miss Dove. Don't you remember that first day Miss Dove came here and talked? She'd have been surprised at the number of things she told. Well, that was one of them."

"But Mrs. Harvey —" Madam Brooke began, with gravity, and then stopped.

Actually, there was no limit, she was aware, to what

Isabel might, in these interplanetary relations of hers, have innocently disclosed.

"Oh, she didn't actually tell me," responded Miss Bixby, impatiently willing to give Mrs. Harvey her due. "I was writing and she asked questions about it, asked to have it confirmed. Uncle Edgar, you know, Aunt Clarissa. She asked them."

"In short, she asked you," said Madam Brooke sternly, "you and your wall paper. Well! what did you say?"

"What did they say?" amended Miss Bixby, as airily as she could manage. "Oh, they confirmed it."

Madam Brooke sat and stared at her and Miss Bixby smiled and wished she could assume an air of engaging carelessness by humming a little song. But that wasn't possible. She couldn't even hum.

"And the key," Madam Brooke suggested. She spoke doubtfully and with some slight hesitation. She was beginning, Miss Bixby hoped, to find a flaw or two in her own cleverness. "What did you do with the key?"

"Now what," said Miss Bixby, amiably suggesting another flaw, "should you do with something you'd helped yourself to, to use for a certain purpose? If you'd used it and didn't expect to have any further use for it and didn't propose being found out, you'd put it back in the place you took it from. The key's down there in the table drawer."

But if she expected Madam Brooke to waste one sigh over her own reverses when the breath of it might be used to acclaim another's prowess, she didn't know her old lady. Madam Brooke smiled a little, then more and more. She even seemed to be proffering Miss Bixby an unbiased admiration.

"Dear me! dear me!" she said, "how much more interesting life is than circulating libraries. Well, now, Miss

Bixby, you've been so frank about it — admirable, I call it — do just tell me what you wanted the stuff for. Because you thought it's worth money?"

"No," said Miss Bixby sulkily, as if, things being at their worst with her, she might as well claim the dreary satisfaction of even unavailing truth, "not altogether."

"Ah," said the old lady astutely, "then you admit you did steal it. Now what for?"

Miss Bixby, lowering, stared at her.

"You never'd understand," she said, "never in the world."

"Try me," said Madam Brooke hopefully. "I understand about most things. Sometimes I understand too much. That was where I came in on your automatic writing. Mrs. Harvey didn't smell out the hocus-pocus in it. I did."

"I know what you thought," said Miss Bixby. "You thought I faked it."

"Well," said the old lady, "I'll give you the very slight benefit of the smallest doubt. Some of it you did fake, for I caught you."

"How did you catch me?"

"Never mind. I did. On the other hand, you may be playing the devil's game and think you're doing God service. I don't know. I only know it's a disorderly, misleading, bedeviling sort of thing, and if you're an honest girl — only half honest — you'd better get out of it."

"Madam Brooke," said the girl, in such earnest that she was breathless over it, "how do you suppose I can sit down and write things I never heard about in my life and the pencil carrying my hand along with it — driving it — and not my hand moving the pencil?"

"I don't know," said the old lady honestly, adding, with a memory of Brooke, "Search me."

"And don't you think," the girl
sioned earnest, "if we find out t
bound to keep on and follow o
leads us — and see where it doe
"No, I don't," said Madam
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pathy and asking advice,
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destiny stirring the torn and gorgeous tapestries of the world. "Nothing to life?"

"There's nothing to it," repeated Miss Bixby obstinately. "There may be for you. You may make yourself think there is. Your slippers and your silks, going to the symphonies and reading Dante, that may carry you along. But when you wake up at three in the morning and your feet are cold, don't you know there's nothing to it then?"

"How the dickens," said the old lady, startled, as if she'd been caught by conjuring, "do you know how I feel when my feet are cold?"

"Because I feel just the same," said Miss Bixby. "It's then I think about life, and I can't help it. And I know it's because my feet are cold, but somehow that seems a part of the whole business, making 'em cold, that awful time in the morning, so the beasts can get me and I can't fight 'em off. And I lie there and say to myself, 'This is life, is it? Well, there's nothing to it.'"

"And then you turn over and get warm," said the old lady, fascinated, "and snuggle a little shawl into bed — the one I packed just now is a nice one for that — and you drop off and wake at seven and you say, 'Well, life isn't such a bad old party after all!'"

"Yes. And maybe there are popovers for breakfast," said Miss Bixby, at once feeling she had betrayed herself and looking foolish.

Madam Brooke gazed at her in a consuming sympathy. Popovers! this volcanic person with a crust of ice could be reconciled to the mysterious gods, for a fleeting hour in the morning, by popovers. She broke into a laugh, and Miss Bixby, whose mind may have followed hers through that satiric commentary, laughed also, though grimly.

"Now," said the old lady, "just what do you find in

your psychic business? What do you think it's going to do for you?"

"Why," said Miss Bixby, now in an absolute agony of wanting to make herself understood, "it's what you said yourself. It's the tribunal. It's knowing there's somewhere where the accounts are kept and things are justified and the reasons known. It isn't leaving these awful loose ends flying. They're gathered up. They're knit into a web."

Madam Brooke, looking at her, shrewdly suspected she wanted the universe reduced to a system of obvious order conformable to her own exactness with the tools of her trade.

"And there's the animals," said Miss Bixby, sitting still, though, in some undesigned way, giving an impression of mentally writhing in these agonies she disclosed. "There's got to be something to account for them. Why, don't you know how they suffer? They suffer all the time."

"There's the Society," said Madam Brooke weakly, knowing this was no answer and yet proffering it as the only palliative at hand.

"It isn't that," said Miss Bixby scornfully. She seemed to be repudiating the mere parochial system of seeing animals through their pain, and sweeping out into the waste places of the world on wings of wrathful questioning. "Why, it isn't only we that abuse 'em. They hunt each other and crunch each other's bones and suck each other's blood, and there isn't one of 'em that isn't afraid — mortally afraid — of something else. What's your tribunal going to say about that? If it's got anything to say I want to hear it, and if automatic writing'll tell me so much as one word — a word here and a word there that I can piece together into something that means something — well, I want it, that's all."

Madam Brooke sought about in her mind for those assuagements she had herself often dismissed as platitudes but which, it seemed to her now, had their uses.

"Of course," said she, "it isn't possible for us to understand. We must believe. They tell us so. They tell us we must have faith."

"Yes," said Miss Bixby, dismissing faith with the monosyllable, "but faith isn't anything. It's a lazy man's religion, that's all. You don't know, so you give it up. It's just exactly as if you were doing arithmetic and you said, 'I can't find an answer to this, and so I can't plan the measurements of the bridge I've got to design or the ship I'm going to build, but it's a great deal more satisfactory than if I could.' Lord!"

The invocation was not irreverent. It seemed to be an appeal.

"Do you go to church?" asked Madam Brooke, in a small voice.

"No," said Miss Bixby shortly. "My Sundays are full. I mend my stockings and rest my back."

"Have you," again Madam Brooke ventured, "any near family?"

"I've got nobody," said the girl. "They died years and years ago, and they might have died sooner for all I'm concerned. All but mother; but she died before I'd begun to earn, so I could give her things. And now you'll say, 'Well, if you fell in love you'd feel differently. Or if you'd married, and had children you'd feel differently.' No, I shouldn't. I should only feel more so. Suppose I fell in love, suppose somebody fell in love with me. Not likely, but suppose it, just for fun." It was a bleak word to use at that point, and she used it bleakly. No one could imagine her doing anything for fun. "Would it last? You know it wouldn't. Madam Brooke, there's

nothing to it. Suppose I had children and thought they'd make up to me for my husband's forgetting he'd been in love with me. Would that last? No! if we were poor, they'd want to get rid of me as soon as I was helpless and old. If we were rich"—She remembered there that Madam Brooke herself was old, and qualified it—"Well, if you're rich, you can manage to play the game. But there's nothing to it."

Madam Brooke sat looking at her and thinking so hard it made her tired head ache. The smooth surface of the girl's face was broken up and seamed by the fighting forces within. Her black eyes burned. She was one fire of need and hunger from top to toe.

"How much did you ever get out of the things you thought you wanted so you'd sell your soul for them?" she was asking fiercely. "Nothing, in the end. You know you didn't. Nobody ever does, only they haven't always the sense to see it or the courage to own up. There's nothing to it, I tell you, nothing."

"So you don't believe," the old lady ventured, "there's anything splendid in fighting here in the dark for the sake of what seems to you good, though you don't know what it is nor exactly why you think it's good? You don't think there's anything fine in crawling along over the stony roadway, trying to smooth it out a little with your bare hands so somebody else will find it easier?"

"I don't know whether it's fine or not," said Miss Bixby. "I know it's heart-breaking. It's a mean game they're playing with us, they knowing all the cards and we putting 'em down any old way because we haven't been told what's trumps."

"Oh yes, we have," said Madam Brooke. "We do know what's trumps."

"Well, in a Poor Richard sort of way, I suppose we do,

— B. Franklin, 'honesty is the best policy' and all that. But to know, really to know! just you think of that. To put up with this hole of an earth because we know there's another one, all — "

She hesitated and Madam Brooke supplied, smiling a little:

"Gold streets and golden slippers."

"I believe in bookkeeping myself," said Miss Bixby, so emphatically that she seemed to be reciting her earthly creed and closing the covers with a bang. "I believe there's got to be something to explain this, or it's going to keep on making us sick, every child that's born into it, till the end of time. And wouldn't that be a mean trick to play on us?" she asked frankly, with no shade of humor. "Shut us up here and forbid us to peek and keep generation after generation of us finding out there's nothing to it."

"Miss Bixby," said Madam Brooke frankly, "I wish you and I had got acquainted before. Why didn't you ever talk."

"I wasn't hired to talk," said Miss Bixby coldly. "I did my work. You do, you know."

"But now," said Madam Brooke, "if my grandson comes back with the elixir of life, or whatever it is, and we hand it over to the owner — and no questions asked — and you oblige Mr. Harvey by giving up the automatic writing — it upsets my daughter very much, you know — don't you think you could stay on and try to find something a little more satisfactory with us than you have yet?"

Miss Bixby stared at her.

"Give up automatic writing?" she repeated. "Why, that's what I'm going to New York for. It wasn't only to run off with the camera case, though that did start me

off to-day. I'm going to launch out. I'm going to open an office and give sittings and write myself blind and crazy but what I'll find out what there is to it."

"That's what you'll do," said Madam Brooke. "You'll addle your brains and weaken your will and you'll get that look they all have — that sly, superior sort of smile that says they don't care how soon this old planet goes to pieces so long as they're in on the ground floor of another one."

The girl rose from her chair. She had ordinarily no personal presence, but now Madam Brooke was surprised to see how tall she looked.

"I tell you," she said, "I don't care that" — she snapped her wiry fingers into the air — "what happens to me. I'm as much of an adventurer as the men that sailed out discovering continents, two or three hundred years ago. They didn't care that either." And again she snapped the capable fingers. "And they weren't afraid of being roasted by cannibals or drowned in the sea. Why, what's discontent, the eating kind of discontent that made them start out and throw their lives overboard when they had to? They knew there was nothing to it. That's what discontent is. And they were trying to find the other end of things, same as I am and that old Mr. Dove. He's trying, too. Only what we're doing is to find the end that's snarled up off there round Orion or the Milky Way and it's an awful long ways off."

"My Lord!" said Madam Brooke, staring at her. "My Lord above!"

The fire in the girl's face died as suddenly as if a wind had puffed it out. Her body relaxed into a dispirited lassitude.

"There's Lieutenant Harvey," she said indifferently. "He's just come in. You'd better go down and meet him

and start him off to Mr. Dove with the stolen goods. I've got to finish packing. If I don't look out, I sha'n't be off to-night."

Madam Brooke rose and went to the door, unlocked it and stood there waiting. Brooke came up in a hurry and he carried the case.

"I suppose," he said "this is all right. It has Mr. Dove's name on the bottom and a New York address."

"Yes," said Miss Bixby. The exchange was as commonplace as if nothing emotional had ever blown through the quiet room. "It's quite all right. You'd better take it down to them at once. I suppose they're worried."

Brooke looked at his grandmother and she nodded her assent, at which he hurried off, his mind full of Andrea. Presently they heard the door close below. Miss Bixby was stirring about the room with her capable, deft movements picking up smaller articles and putting them in the tray of her trunk. Madam Brooke turned to her, was about to speak and waited. It was evident that Miss Bixby, smiling rather satirically, was also about to speak.

"Didn't I tell you," she said composedly, meeting Madam Brooke's glance, "there's nothing to it? There's nothing to anything on this beastly earth. Now this — here I thought I'd got my hands on something that would move. I knew that old man hadn't enough life left in him for anything but muddling away the thing, even if there's anything to it. I knew I could find a way to get it looked into by the right kind of man. And here you take it away from me, back to him, and he'll sit and stare at it till he drops into his grave. And what'll become of it then? The girl will marry and her children will want the case to play with and pour the stuff out into the back yard. There's nothing to it, I tell you — life. Or if

there is, they've sworn to keep their secret. They're bound we sha'n't know."

The bitterness of this was so poignant that Madam Brooke could not answer even with the last poor palliative on her lips. She turned and went gravely away to her own room on the floor below. But Miss Bixby had not finished packing when she was back again. She came slowly, for she was tired, and she bore in both hands, as if it were a precious offering to be carried ceremoniously, an oblong package done up in soft white paper.

"You look here, my dear," she said, dropping into a chair and resting the parcel on her knees. "I bought this for Beatrice Hayden, about the beginning of the war. They'd just imported it. And then the war began and Phil went off and Bee hadn't any heart for clothes. And I thought I'd keep it till she began to live again. The young do, you know. They must. But now I want to give it to you."

She lifted the folds of paper, and Miss Bixby drew a quick breath at the beauty of the fabric gleaming up at them, gold in hue and of a texture almost impalpable where it was not crusted by the rich embroidery of flowers and leaves. It was queens' covering in the days when queens were what they can never be again.

"What could I do with it?" asked Miss Bixby, in a tone of sad wonder that anybody could think of its pertaining in any propriety to her. "Where could I wear it?"

"You could wear it in your room," said Madam Brooke hopefully. "It would be something to build up from. You must have more pleasures, my dear, more of the things that take our minds off the bad things in the world. They do keep their secrets, the Ones that arranged the world. I know that, just as well as you do. I don't know that I blame Them. They must have their reasons.

But you can't dwell on it. If we dwell on it, we get queer. Buy you a flower to smell, or hear some music, or wear a pretty frock. When I look at some of those things They've given us, I find I can believe They're not so unfriendly to us, after all. Now I'm going to put this in the top of your trunk. You hang it on a chair in the sun and see how it makes you feel." She got up, laid the package in the tray, and gave it a little affectionate pat of loving farewell. Then she held out her hand. "I'm going to lie down awhile," she said. "Perhaps I sha'n't see you again."

Miss Bixby took the fragile hand that had yet such strength of will in it, and involuntarily bent her head a little over it. It looked as if she wanted to kiss it. She did want to, but she simply couldn't do it. The ice of habit had begun to form again about her heart.

But Madam Brooke did not rest for any space of time. She was lying on her bed, hands folded, her tired body inert, when Brooke knocked and, when she bade him, came in and shut the door behind him. He still carried the case and he looked worried.

"See here," said he, "what am I going to do with it? I've knocked and knocked at her door and nobody answers."

"Keep it till morning then," she said, "unless you think it'll be too much of a strain for her to wait."

"Oh, she'll know," said Brooke, "when she comes home. I tucked a card under the door and told her it was found."

"Open it, dear," said Madam Brooke. She called on her patient inner forces for one thrill more. "I want to see how the thing looks."

"I can't," said Brooke. "It's locked."

XXI

THE next step before Andrea was into the brambly thicket of the tortured truth. Yet she took it without hesitating as she would have taken a bigger leap into more dubious ground to serve her father. He must, at all costs, at least until she heard from Brooke, be spared the shock of finding out about Miss Bixby and the olympium. When he came home, he would go at once into the laboratory, and his first glance would be for the case on the table. She must be away, out of reach of questioning. He had told her to look for rooms at the West End. That would account for her. She set out bread and fruit — the only food she could persuade him now to touch — and left a written message for him in his room. She had gone out, she told him, and it seemed to her safer to take the olympium with her. It was, she reminded him, what they used to do. Andrea smiled a little, as she read over the message, a least little smile that had no mirth in it, remembering, but without emotion, the straight lines of her old integrity. Once the truth meant naked fact. It still did, others more heroic than she who had built their houses hat rock where, however the winds beat and the floods ne, they fall not. But, as it seemed to her now, when ou rest the tottering pillars of your house upon a lie, it is a small matter if you top it with a disorderly brick the more. You build as you can, propping the shameful pile where you must, in the terrified hope of its lasting briefly,

but aware that, in the end, foredoomed, it falls. And she had seen enough of Nemesis to believe that, when it does topple to its ruin, with a savage honesty inherent in even the false work of man it traps and crushes him who built it. But that was beside the purpose. She had done her deed and she was ready for her punishment. She went out and up the street the way Brooke would come if he had news for her, walked past the Harveys to the block above and paced up and down, keeping watch of their door and the car before it. Finally, when her tired mind fell into doubt and told her she had somehow missed him, Brooke ran out, got into the car and drove away. She followed and saw it turn to the right at Arlington Street, not to the left, as if he were going to her. Dispirited, she walked back to a corner within sight of her own house, lingered there a little and, with a perfunctory design of accounting to her father for her absence, wandered about the West End for an hour, looking for rooms. Her mind was no longer keen; she could not even set it to work at guessing what might happen. It was too dull and stiffened. The sight of Brooke whirling away from her had looked final; it did not seem likely that he would return. She had her luncheon and wandered about again. With the early dusk she was suddenly tired all over, not her mind only but her whole body, and then she did go home and found his card with the message saying the case was found. That was good, she thought, that was temporary comfort, though she would have to explain it all to her father; and how that was to be done, with her mind so tired, she could not see. But he had not come yet, and she got something to eat and arranged a tray for him, hoping he would lie down and let her bring it to him. And as the dusk deepened and she began to find, with the strength food gave her, that she was strong enough to

balance possibilities of accident and yet not strong enough to fight them off, he came. He was tired, more tired even than she had expected. He carried the little box, and he seemed in excellent spirits. He gave her a nod but no word, and went on, as she expected, into the laboratory, and at once she heard him laugh. Had he seen the case was gone? He must have, at the instant of entering. The light from the street lamp was enough to show up every corner. She crept nearer the door and listened, and still he laughed, snatches of low amused laughter, and hummed a little in the intervals between.

"Andrea!" he called, and now she knew he would tell her and she must explain to him all that had happened and that the case was safe with Brooke. She braced herself for it, but he called again, lightly, pleasantly, as she hardly remembered he could speak:

"I'll have a bite of supper now."

That was reprieve for her and she was glad. She had it ready shortly, and he came out and sat down to it. He was eating with determination, not as if the food appealed to him but knowing he must hearten himself, and she wondered if everything was going to frighten her now: for it did frighten her to guess what he might be heartening himself for. When he had finished, he sat a moment looking down at his plate and her pulse answered with a leap of fear. He was going, she knew, to tell her something for which she was not prepared. He looked up at her, and she shrank a little before the amused, satiric gleam in his black eyes.

"So," he said, "they've got it, haven't they, just as I thought they would?"

"Who?" she managed to ask.

"The woman that came here, the one that told me it was worth thousands of dollars. Or Peter Harvey. He's

probably sitting there in his library planning the prospectus for his syndicate, so they can exploit it as soon as I'm dead. He'll keep it hidden till then."

"But daddy," she said, as she had said to him before, "you believed in Peter Harvey."

"He's an honest man," he owned, with an air of magnificent concession, "as men go. But he believes in business as I believe in another world. Do you suppose he could resist a brilliant opening like that, when he saw it before him, any more than I could resist trying to make my connection between this world and the other? I don't blame him. It's his form of energy, just as it's mine to bring down fire from God. How did he manage it?" he ended abruptly. "Do you know? Did he come himself, or did he send the woman?"

She shrank from telling him now while that ungoverned light was playing in his eyes, because if she did offer him the literal fact it would confirm his doubts of Peter Harvey.

"It's a queer story," she said. "But all that matters to us now is that it's safe."

He laughed, a low reflective laugh, as if it wouldn't be possible for him to tell or even quite realise himself how humorous he found life and its harsh ironies.

"Yes," he said, "that's of the utmost importance for us: to know it's safe."

She wished he would tell her about his day.

"Did you find anything?" she asked him.

"Yes," he said, "I found something."

He began smiling in that way she found so repellent: the sly smile of narrowed eyes and half pursed lips, the facial commentary of the egoist who has again vindicated his own astuteness.

"At the South End?" she pursued.

"Well!"

He seemed to be thinking it over, weighing what she had best be told.

"If it isn't the South End, it is sufficiently remote, Andrea, far enough away from here for none of them to think of it, not even you."

"Think of what?" she asked.

But that he did not answer.

"I want you," he said, "to listen to me, listen with all your might, and memorise what I say, so you never will forget. For the time is short."

"What do you mean?" she asked, her heart sinking, "by saying the time is short?"

"My time," he said. "My time is short. You will have to take over my work."

"You mean," she said, trying, with a painstaking intentness, to help him clarify his turbid mind — "what you said before about watching with you, listening to hear you call?"

"Partly," he said. "That, too. But let us take it in course. I have had strange intuitions lately. When a thing has happened I have known it in advance. When that woman came here to buy me, I knew she was coming. I didn't know who it was to be, but I knew somebody was coming to get my discovery away from me. That shows my soul has got the better of the body. It's got outside. It isn't going to use the body very much longer."

"I'd rather," said Andrea, with a pitiful attempt to recall him to her own need of him, "I'd rather have you in your body, even if you didn't know so much."

"The woman isn't a bad sort," he said, reflecting. "If she hadn't that mania for writing she'd be a very good sort indeed. She's as determined as the devil — or as I am.

But we mustn't think we can believe in her. We know we can't. Dismiss it. The amount of it is, you've got to take the whole thing on your shoulders."

"But, father," she ventured, because it did not seem possible to let him persist in building on the weakness of her ignorance, "how could I prove what you haven't proved yourself?"

"I shall write it out," he said. "I shall begin to-night. And I shall help you from the other end of the line. Don't look like that," he cried, in a nervous gust of impatience at an emotion so far removed from his celestial casuistry. "I'm not going to die now. They wouldn't snatch me away with my work half done. But we must prepare, and when we've moved from here and it's safe to have the olympium by us, you must guard it as you'd guard your life. And you must look about until you find some man to help you."

"To help me, father? help me what?"

It sickened her to draw him on and yet she knew it was all to be said or she could not quiet him.

"A scientist," he said, thinking it out as he spoke, "a man young, enthusiastic, imaginative, with an inventor's brain. Make him love you, Andrea, make him love you," he repeated, with a fevered intensity. "You are a beautiful woman. I've been watching you lately, studying out what you could do."

"O father!" she cried out, ashamed.

"Make him insane with wanting you. Insanity's a good thing, my girl, sometimes. It's the only one that will do the things that lie between heaven and earth as this does. Don't let him marry you, for if you do he'll be the one to set the pace and you the one to follow. I see it in you. Your mother was, too. You're like her. It wasn't till she was snatched away from me that I realised

everything I'd got to do, to find her, to tell her I was sorry — well, well, all that's long ago, long ago."

He sank into musing for a moment, his head bent, his face, as she ventured a glance at it, darkened by remembered grief.

"Men can't mourn forever," he said. "My trying to speak to her grew into this other thing, speaking to the world where she might be. At first the man tries to fight out the way to his own little wish, and then he sees he's been led on through that to doing the great thing, not for himself but all men." Then his mind reverted to passionate adjuration. "Don't give him power over you, Andrea. Keep your foot on his neck. If you love him better than your life, don't let him know it till he has worked out my problem as I set it down for him. Then do as you like," he ended contemptuously, and though she inevitably shrank, she knew the contempt was not for her but for the pretensions of man in a universe where the atom is but the atom and the whole looms implacably large. "Satisfy your instincts. Pay tribute before you go. But you will have done your task and what becomes of you personally — "

There he stopped, and she wondered if it was because he realised his deduction would sound so monstrous that involuntarily, in human kindness to her, he spared her the hearing of it. But he had minimised all mortal pretensions until she too felt small and weak.

"It does make a difference what becomes of me, daddy," she said, recalling him by a touch on his arm. "Not to the other worlds you talk about. I don't know about them. But to you — and mother, daddy! remember mother in her blue dress — it makes a difference to you."

He put his hand over the fingers trembling on his arm.

"Yes, Andrea, yes," he said kindly. But it was a per-

functory gentleness, she despairingly felt, a surface sympathy the reflex of her tone. "Of course your mother'd care. She did wear a blue dress," he exclaimed, in a sudden burst of what sounded like alarm at this rising of unconsidered trifles from the dead welter of oblivion. "How did you remember that? I hadn't thought of it for years. My God!" he muttered to himself, as if returning to the garden of beauty which was his youth and the playtime of his love, dark now under the yews of sorrow and the briers of forgetfulness. "How can such things be!"

He sat silent for a moment, going back and back, Andrea could see, and then snatching himself out of the dark garden in terror at thinking where the paths might lead him. He rose so abruptly that her hand fell from his arm.

"Go to bed," he said curtly. "You're dog-tired. I shall sit up and write." And he went into the laboratory and shut the door.

Then the virtue of endurance ran out of her and she knew she was indeed dog-tired. These were things she could not think of any more until her blurred brain was again sentient to impressions. She could not even suffer because he loved the system of worlds God had made too much to love her whom he had himself called into this present life. She could not wonder because he seemed so entirely unmoved by the loss of his olympium nor speculate upon the meaning of that look on his face which seemed to say he knew strange sequels to all mortal happenings. She got ready for bed in a daze and was more than half asleep when she lay down on her couch there in the living room and floated off into a blank forgetfulness, eased by gratitude that at least none of these things need be thought of any more to-night.

After a long night, as it seemed to her at the moment,

she awoke, perhaps at a sound in the room. Or it was not so much a sound as the consciousness of a presence. She raised herself on her elbow, her heart beating thickly, and stared into the half darkness; but nothing moved, and she lay there following familiar outlines and verifying them, calming more and more. But when her darting glance sought to pierce the obscurity by the outer door, she found there a darker shadow, the figure of a man. At the little sound of alarm she made he moved and spoke. It was her father.

"Go back to sleep again. I'm going out."

"You mustn't, dear," she said, confused. "It's the middle of the night. Or else it's morning. Anyway it's too dark to do anything. Father, please."

"Lie down," he said, "and get your sleep. You'll need it. I'll tell you about it when I come back."

He opened the door, went out and shut it with a bang, as if to give her added corroboration, and she heard his steps, quick and light, upon the pavement. She could not follow him, but it was impossible to sleep. Step by step of late she had entered into a state of intense nervousness responsive to every move he made. She was living in a condition of acute alarm, watchful and, at every shift in the current of their lives, reminding herself to be prepared. She got up, shut her windows, went into the laboratory and turned on the light. His table was empty except for some loose sheets of paper, pen and ink. The paper was covered with his fine small script. It was, she judged from the first words, a scientific exposition; it had no significance for her. She looked in all possible hiding-places for the box he had carried in his hand that morning. It was not there. He must have taken it with him. She returned to the living room, dressed, put on a coat because her nervousness, rather than the night, had

made her cold, and sat down to wait. It was eleven when she finished dressing, and at twelve she lay down on her bed as she was and drew the blankets over her. Now she was vividly awake, facing the night or the call which might draw her forth into it, possibly to find him or go with him on some quest. She felt the gradations of squalid misery the watcher always feels: the personal discomfort of meeting the night in disorderly precautions against its chill, the inevitable anger at the rape of those sweet hours. And then, at two, he came. She heard his steps growing along the pavement, she heard his key in the lock, and he came in. When he closed the door behind him he drew a deep breath. Something, it said, was done. At first she thought she would not speak. He should believe she was asleep and then he might go into his room and sleep also. But he called her.

"Andrea!" The tone was short and sharp. "Wake up."

"Yes, father," she said, threw off her covering and rose. She turned on the light and he gave another sound of satisfaction.

"You dressed," he said. "That's good. Now sit down and I'll tell you."

He drew forward one of the chairs from the table and motioned her to take it. He was about to pull off his coat, but she stopped him by a touch.

"Keep it on," she said. "It's cold."

He sat down as he was and she took the chair he had indicated.

"Andrea," said he, "were you surprised when I found the case of olympium had been stolen and was neither taken aback nor — nor anything you'd have expected me to be?"

"No," she said stupidly. Then a little outcry against

the way she found life treating her did leap from her. "Father," she said, "I don't believe there's enough of me left to be surprised at anything."

"I told you," he said, "I knew it was coming. I knew they were going to break and enter and get it away from me. If they found me watching it, they'd kill me. If they found you, and you resisted, they'd kill you. So I put it in the box you saw me carry out this morning. I told you it was certain appliances, I don't remember what. I thought you might as well not know. The less you knew, the less they could make you tell. I carried it round with me all day, and that woman came here and stole the case she thought it was in, and Peter Harvey is a fool for his pains. And when I was out to-day, Andrea" — here his voice rose exultantly and she saw this was the climax of his flamboyant deed — "I went through a street where they were laying bricks in front of vacant lots they're filling in. And I went up there to-night and pried up the bricks, and buried my olympium in the sand. It's God's mercy the weather is mild. No frost, Andrea! God meant it, don't you see?"

"But, father," she cried, "you've hidden it so you never can get it again. You've thrown it away."

"No, I haven't, my girl," said he, and now he looked so sly that he seemed no longer her father but a malevolent intelligence that might easily become dreadful to her. "I have counted the bricks, north, east, south and west. I have measured the distance from the corner. I could go there with a flash-light and dig it up again in twenty minutes. And when we've found another place where Peter Harvey's spies won't break in and brain us for it, I'll dig it up again and you'll see — you'll see!"

He laughed derisively and long, and she was afraid.

"Now," he said, "I'll make out my chart, so that

whether I'm alive or dead, it sha'n't be lost. It won't take long."

He went off into the laboratory, and she heard him laughing in what seemed that terrible derision against the hostile powers he had outwitted. She rose, smoothed the clothing on her bed and suddenly felt, like a tortured child, how bright the light was in the room, but that she had no strength left to turn it off. She lay down and covered her eyes and was immediately asleep. As she fell into the gulf of it, she was conscious of but one thing: that she had escaped that torturing light.

XXII

AGAIN it seemed to Andrea that she had been asleep a long time, more than a night, sunk in the depths of many nights, and that she was slowly and unwillingly coming awake. Yet because it was so still a paradise where she lay, it became the more essential to her to cling there, to whatever she could find belonging to it, and refuse to come awake. She might have been a water creature the slow persistent action of the breathing tide was trying to cast up into an element less friendly, so that she had to lay hold of what she might, possibly the piles of the harbor of that too familiar shore, and sway there, her body laved by the moving water, and yet safe in it so long as she held on. Wherever she was — and it seemed mysteriously the room as well as the encompassing tide — she was aware, not through hearing or the testimony of her closed eyes, that some one had come in. At first it seemed to be one person and then it was two who were beside her, in some manner contemplating her. It cost her no trouble to reconcile being in the water and at the same time in her bed. It cost her no thought to reconcile the two persons as being very near, intensely interested in her and so well known to her that she could accept their presence while in no sense defining it. Whether it was dark or light about her she did not know, the artificial brightness of the room where she lay in the surge of sleep presently

to break, or the darkness of the water where she hung in that motioned calm. But the two were there. They wished her infinitely well, and though they seemed to have nothing to say to her, their presence alone brought her an exquisite calm. She had, for an instant, the fleeting certainty which comes at moments in the troubled space of a lifetime, of that complete understanding which puts an end to doubt. It is the golden key we are all seeking and are never allowed to possess. But sometimes, for a moment merely, it seems as if we are permitted to hold it in our tired hands. So, for the instant allotted her, she held the key. In trying afterward to remember and weave the moment into the web of certainties so that she might never lose it, she thought of the instant as very short and again that it was long. For it seemed to have lasted from the day when God made man to the day when He meant to gather him up to carry him elsewhere, and the significance of it was: "This is My intention toward you." And the intention was beneficently kind, so kind that there was something ridiculous in the scepticism of a world which had found it anything else. She had nothing to say to the two who were bending over her in this intensity of concern, as if they were bent on stamping her individuality on their own memory to keep, a most sacred possession, as one keeps the portrait of the far beloved. She felt no astonishment or gratitude over being allowed, for that instant, to hold the golden key. Everything was so inevitably as it had to be, that what was showed her its benign face as the child of what had been and the precursor of what must be. But suddenly something silent in her mind spoke out. She heard it quite plainly, as if a sleeper should wake and unexpectedly throw a word into a theme that was going on without him:

"Why, you've got on your blue dress!"

And one of the two beside her either laughed or in some way implied a sense of the absurd dearness that leads to such laughing, and the other joined it, and it was apparent they loved her for that in some special way and that somehow she had shown them their coming meant to her all they could have wished. And then, shattering the stillness of the room, dispelling the dear silent laughter of the two, she heard her father's voice, full, assured, commanding:

"Andrea! Andrea! Andrea!"

And her eyes, after that instant when the water cast her up and the stillness and the presences were blotted out, came open to daylight in the room, paling out the gas, and she sat up, her heart suffocating her, and set her feet on the floor. Whether she answered her father she could never afterward be sure. Sometimes she made herself believe she did answer, that she cried:

"Yes, father, yes! I am coming."

But she did, without longer delay than that one bewildered instant, run to the laboratory door and throw it open on such drearness as the grey dawn seemed to have come to show her. He sat there at his table, his head fallen forward on the scattered sheets of paper under his hand, and the hand had a curious look of possession, of asserting its dominion to the last. She touched him on the shoulder, not to waken him too suddenly, cried out, in spite of herself, and started back. She had never touched a shoulder that felt like that. She had been in the act of bending to look at him more closely, to put her face to his, to call to him. But the touch told her, and she ran out of the room and out of the house and looked along the dreary street just waking. A man was coming toward her, a watchman from night duty at the garage, and she beckoned him, looking so wild of countenance

and so strange with her disordered hair and clothes, that he broke into a run. But she told him quietly:

"Will you get me some one? I can't leave him. He is dead."

XXIII

LATER that morning, indeed well along in the forenoon to give Andrea time to get her house in order, Brooke set out to deliver the recovered case. He had meant to go immediately after breakfast, and chafed at waiting. But his father, with whom he had had a long session of talk the night before, detained him. Peter was in the library when Brooke came down.

"I wouldn't go over there now," Peter Harvey said, appearing in the doorway, and yet speaking with lowered voice. His wife did not know what things had come to pass, and it was inexpedient, to his mind, that she should ever know, unless she did sometime return to her old abounding charity. Peter felt he couldn't bear to hear anybody else blamed, at least from Isabel's lips, either Miss Bixby who had stolen the thing or the Doves who had brought such obscure issues into the house which had been confused enough before.

"She'll be anxious," said Brooke.

"Not after your note. You said you left one."

"Still," said Brooke, "I do think she'll be anxious."

He had what he called a wireless feeling that Andrea needed him, though he had been smiling at himself since the early morning when he woke with it and told himself it was S. O. S. And yet he knew the probabilities might be it was only because he needed her. All night he had been sending out S. O. S. to her.

"Come in here," said his father.

Brooke stepped in and Peter shut the library door.

"Do you know how they live down there?" he asked. "It's a kind of a barn where they eat and one of 'em sleeps. I don't know what's in behind. You'll only bother her if you go butting in now. Your mother and I went in the morning and it was all right enough because they knew we were coming, but I shouldn't do it again. The place was as neat as wax. The girl's a wonder. But I shouldn't go for a couple of hours at least."

Brooke fretted away the time for an hour, taking down a book from the shelf, reading it discontentedly, flouting it with inarticulate comment and putting it back. His father, writing with what seemed an unnoting placidity, smiled a little, and when Brooke came up to the table and stopped, looking down at him evidently with something to communicate, Peter glanced inquiringly up.

"Dad," said Brooke, with the disproportioned irritation of one who finds his task of inaction too much for him, "how can you sit there paying bills?"

"I feel rather obliged to," said Peter mildly. "We have to, you know — pay our bills."

"You seem to know such a confounded lot," Brooke grumbled, "you and grannie. You go along about your business, both of you, as if nothing was ever going to faze you. She's a regular New England witch and you're a sphinx, a he-sphinx." Then it came out, what his tumultuous mind had been hurrying to. "I suppose you know I wanted to marry Andrea."

"She knew it, anyway," said Peter, "your grandmother did. Only she thinks you want to now."

"The devil she does!"

Brooke stared. His father was on the point of adding:

"She says Phil never married Andrea. What do you say?"

But he shut his lips on that. With a present befogged to him the future looked too precarious to tamper with. He did not look up at Brooke again and inwardly advised himself to curb his curiosity as to whether Brooke was looking at him. The next moment, when his interest really wouldn't down and he concluded he might as well know how the boy took it, Brooke snatched the case from the table and disappeared with the speed of a wind that, having made all the disturbance that could be expected of its particular velocity might as well hurry on to another corner of the heavens and new cloud spaces. Peter heard the outer door bang after him, and immediately gave up his work. It had been perfunctory, assumed to give him a not too exigent air and keep Brooke at ease with him. Now he began whistling softly and thought about life.

Brooke dashed down to the dreary West End street in short order and plied the knocker with determination. He was met at once, not by Andrea but a stout fresh-faced woman with her out-door things on. She looked at him doubtfully and he asked for Andrea. She wasn't sure, she told him, whether Miss Dove would feel like seeing him. Or perhaps he was one of the family.

"What is it?" asked Brooke.

His heart sickened. This, he understood, was the meaning of her S. O. S. The woman answered now with a professional gentleness, seeing he was moved:

"It's Mr. Dove. He died last night. I'm going out now to get in some supplies."

Brooke motioned her to stand aside and walked into the living room. The laboratory door was open and he could see the outline of something on trestles and a bit of Andrea's skirt where she sat beside it. The woman followed him until he entered and she saw Andrea's face, as

she caught sight of him, and then she went out and left them. Brooke felt himself shuddering all over. It was new to him. He had not shuddered in battle, but this present tremor was because he had seen Andrea as dead. She was entirely composed. She even looked up smilingly.

"I hoped you'd come," she said. "I've got something to tell you. I shall be going away at once. Father's gone, you see. I couldn't stay here without him."

For a moment he thought she meant she had resolved to go the road her father had taken, but at once he saw that was not so. She was regarding the world "but as the world."

"Of course you must go away," he answered. "You'll come to us."

That she might not have heard, for she paid no attention to it.

"I shall go to New York," she said. "I shall work for speed, — my stenography, you know. Then I can get a job. But that isn't it," she continued quickly, to forestall him. "I sha'n't see any of you again, and so I want to say now, while father's here — " She paused a moment and put her hand to her throat as if it hurt her. "He never would have let me do it," she went on, "never, never, if he'd been himself. Mother never would. But they don't blame me. They've been lovely — " Here she stopped again, with that pathetic hand at her throat, and he advanced a pace and took the hand and held it hard.

"What 's the use of talking," he said, "when I know? There's never anything you need say to me."

"Oh, yes, there is," said Andrea, smiling at him and leaving the hand in his, very glad it was there to help her through her trial. "You don't know this. I never

saw your brother. I saw his picture at your house, and I thought it was you and you were killed, and I told your father and mother their son had married me. I did it for money. That was precisely what I did it for, — for money."

She did not look up at him and he stood staring at the line her lashes made. When she did look up, it was not at him but at that covered immobility which had been her father, as if to gain courage from it.

"And I've got my father back," she said dreamily and most happily. "He hasn't been himself, not for years; but last night before he called me — " There she paused, knowing she could not go into that with any chance of making herself understood, and Brooke gripped her hand and could say nothing.

"You hurt my hand," said Andrea, with another little smile that thanked him for the hurt.

His kindness, his dearness in not letting it go as soon as he knew she told lies for money seemed to her something to remember afterward with the certainty of the two presences that came to her last night and the feel of the golden key.

"Why," said Brooke, having not much of a voice to say it, and letting her hand loose a very little, "why, my darling, then you did wait for me, after all."

She looked at him now, and more and more he seemed a part of the night and the golden key. But there, with the immobile presence beside them, they stopped. Andrea was still sure that although he forgave her she had proved too poor a thing to be admitted again to the heaven where she had lived with him in fancy, and Brooke knew they were already there in the heaven and that he could presently tell her so. But this moment belonged not to him but to the dead. The body lying there insisted, by its

very presence, on all the rites and oblations due the closing of the account of dust with dust. Brooke held up the case before her.

"What shall I do with it?" he asked. "Let me keep it for you till — Father'll put it in the safe."

At that she had her little rueful smile, and this too was a thing she could not go into now. Why tell him olympium had been capriciously, by one of those turns of the hand of fate that seem so idle and yet are full of a deep intent, snatched away again and covered from the eyes of men? Were the gods really jealous, she wondered briefly. Was their only supremacy this secret of the continuance of things, and did they fear for their own godhead if they gave it over into mortal hands? And then for an instant she had again the feel of the golden key. She sat looking at the familiar case, wondering. They had guarded it so long, she and her father, that it seemed to her impossible it should not carry some vast significance.

"How does it feel?" she asked. "Is it light? Could there be something in it, do you think?"

"Something in it?" he repeated. "Why, isn't his olympium in it?"

That she did not answer.

"Yes, keep it," she said. "Open it when you feel like it and see. And now will you look over those papers on the desk? They were what he was working on last night. See if they are directions. See if you can find a sort of chart."

He went over to the desk and began examining the papers page by page, reading, comparing, frowning more and more. Finally he rose and came to her, evening their edges thoughtfully.

"I'm pretty sure," he hesitated, "I'm sorry, but I'm sure his mind wasn't working right. They are — Andrea, dear, they're not what you'd expect."

That was a long way from describing their madness of confusion, but it was, he felt, all he could say.

"Aren't they," she seemed begging him to agree, "aren't they scientific data, something like that?"

He shook his head.

"They're theorizings," he said, "about the distances of planets and the influence of elements and the travelling of sound. They're not coherent even. No, there's nothing, Andrea, nothing."

"There's a chart," she insisted. "There must be a chart."

He showed her a sheet traversed by one wandering line. In a corner of the page were figures, the words "ten feet from the corner, thirty bricks west," and then the whole had been effaced by a scrawling network of lines and written under it, as if in a tempest of bewilderment was the word, three times repeated, "no — no — no." She was right. The gods had hidden the evidence of immortality under the bricks of an unknown street. But she sought for the feel of the golden key and was content.

"I'll take the whole business away with me," said Brooke. "Andrea!"

She looked up at him and waited.

"She's back again," he said, "your woman. Leave her here and come out for a little walk."

"Oh, no," said Andrea. "I promised him I wouldn't leave him. I did this morning because I had to run out and tell the man to send somebody in. But I couldn't quite help that, and it didn't seem to matter because he had just spoken to me, and they'd both been here. I know her dress was blue! That was the queer part of it. And besides, the olympium wasn't here and he hadn't had time to tell me what to do."

All this troubled Brooke exceedingly, because, not understanding, she seemed to him light-headed. But the nurse came and stood in the doorway, looking kind and capable, and Andrea smiled at her as if she liked her, and Brooke read the counsel in the woman's eyes, and, with a word to Andrea, took up the case again and went away.

His father was still in the library and Brooke burst in on him.

"See here," said he, "why don't we go over to Tech and see what's in this thing?"

Peter laid down the pen that gave him pretext for his solitude, and rose.

"What's in it?" he repeated. "Why, don't they know what's in it?"

"She doesn't," said Brooke. "And he — father, he's dead."

And all that occurred to Peter to say was "Poor devil!" It was not even in his mind to say "Poor girl!" He could not cajole himself into any decent pretence of thinking Andrea was not most mercifully set free.

"I thought I'd better bring it away with me," said Brooke. "She's in no state to be reminded of it. Now what do you think of taking it over to Tech and getting it analysed?"

"It's locked, isn't it?" said Peter. "She give you the key?"

"No. I couldn't bother her. I'd rather break it open. I'll take the responsibility. Dad —" he hesitated and finished, in a manly way, "you might as well know I'm undertaking all sorts of responsibilities for her from now on."

Peter looked at him, tried to say the proper thing, wondering what it was, failed, got up, put his hand on Brooke's shoulder and asked:

"She isn't alone down there?"

"No, there's a nurse with her. That's the best we can do."

"You run up," said Peter, after another minute of thought, "and tell your grandmother: just that he's dead, you know, and how you left her."

Brooke found the rest of that forenoon a processional of strange things. He ran up to grandmother, who was in bed, and succinctly reported all he had learned at Andrea's, qualifying nothing, and she looked at him out of the lace clouds that obscured the ills time had done her and said:

"Yes, dear. I'll get up."

He ran downstairs and found Beatrice standing with his father at the library door, pink from her morning walk and subtly not the Beatrice of yesterday. Brooke stopped with a jolt of the heart, knowing he should never see the Beatrice of yesterday again. She was quietly confident, and, if looks meant anything, what those who have lost the world call happy. She was evidently, at the instant of his downward rush, trying to tell Peter something difficult, and the slightly dropped lids gave her face that exquisite softness and wonder of knowledge mothers wear. But she roused herself for Brooke and gave him, with the old smile of youthful understanding, something ineffably more.

"Morning, Brooke," said she. "I've been trying to tell him" — with a hand returned to Peter — "how different everything is now I've heard. I was right, you see. He did like me. I was the one. And life isn't so awfully long anyway. I'm not going to whimper. I'm going to play the game."

Peter, delighting in her gameness, yet heard the commenting voice of time recognised within him, loving her,

lamenting over her and mourning: "Life isn't so very long? Not for old age upstairs there in its bed, fighting the last gallant inch, not for me at my breathless milestone of middle age. But you, poor flower of youth! how many mornings have got to shed their dews, how many suns set in lonely beauty on the grave of your remembrance! It's a long pull, dear youth, to that goal of everlasting faithfulness, with oblivion dogging you all the way." But all he said was:

"That's my girl. Take it standing."

And Brooke, wishing he could tell her about Andrea and how she and Andrea would like each other, drew back from flouting her with his own and Andrea's consummate bliss, and Beatrice went up to find Isabel, and Brooke and his father set off to Cambridge.

Peter Harvey had a friend in Technology, an eminent chemist, and him they sought. They gave him no explanation, no previous history of the leather case. They simply wanted him to tell them what was inside. The eminent chemist stood by while Brooke broke the lock and then took it over to a table under a good light and opened it. There it was, a package done up securely in newspaper, tied with string. His Eminence lifted it out, untied it, opened the paper, looked at the contents, glanced at the two men, went back to the contents again, took up a pinch of it and let it fall. Then he looked at Peter again and inquired pleasantly:

"What's the joke, old man?"

"What do you make of it?" Peter asked him.

"Handle it," said His Eminence. "Look at it. Smell it, if you want to. What do you make of it yourself?"

"Why," said Peter feeling unwontedly small, "it looks to me like common sand."

"Yes," said the professor drily, "that's what it is, common sand. Now what's the joke?"

They never told him. They apologised, Peter so shamefacedly that His Eminence saw there was more beneath than he needed to know, and forgave them. They thanked him and went home. And on the way Brooke talked to him about Andrea.

Meantime Madam Brooke had got up and seated herself by the fire in her own room waiting until Susanne should tell her Beatrice had gone. When she heard that, she asked Susanne to tell Mrs. Harvey she wanted to see her. Isabel came in, subdued, her pink cheeks paled, her drooping air challenging the kindness the old lady's was not yet prepared to give her. She went to her mother and kissed the old lady's proffered cheek.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. "I ought to have come earlier but Bee has been in. She kept me."

"I'm all right," said Madam Brooke. "There's your chair. Draw up."

It was a low rocker, almost, though ordinarily capacious, like a child's chair, and when Isabel had taken it she felt small and indecisive beside her mother who sat so straight and high and looked so perfectly equipped for the offices of life. Isabel did not feel equipped. She had lost Miss Bixby. She had said good-by to her with sorrow immeasurable and tears unrestrained. She had been living on Miss Bixby and the pabulum she brought her from that vague other world. And she sat there and looked absently into the fire and dreaded the impact of her mother's kind intellectuality, and her poor lip trembled.

"How's Bee?" asked Madam Brooke.

"Beautiful," said Isabel. She was glad to take a delaying saunter into Bee's psychology. "She doesn't say much. About all she says is she's going to play the game. It's splendid, but I can't help wishing she wouldn't take it

just that way, — setting her teeth, you know, holding on. She might get such a lot of comfort, such direct inspiration — "

"Out of automatic writing?" inquired Madam Brooke. "She couldn't. Bee could no more take comfort in that than in the witches that befuddled Macbeth. Now Isabel, how long are you going to keep this house a house of mourning over your explorations of the dark continent?"

Isabel looked at her with appealing eyes and her lip trembled.

"Why, mother," she said, "that's exactly what I'm trying to prevent. I don't want it a house of mourning. I want it recognised that Phil isn't dead. He's alive and we can hear from him every day."

"It isn't Phil's death that's made it a house of mourning," said the old lady inexorably. "It isn't because the rest of us don't feel his presence, whatever it is, whether it's actually Phil or the beautiful memory of him. It isn't Phil we've lost. It's you."

Isabel was unfeignedly surprised.

"Why," said she, "I'm right here. Nothing has changed — except for Phil."

"Your husband," said Madam Brooke, "has lost his wife. You used to be — O Belle, you never knew very much, but you were a perfect dear to live with. Peter couldn't come into the house without hooting to find out where you were. He couldn't settle to anything till he knew. Now he shuts himself up in the library and pretends to write."

"That," said Isabel solemnly, "is his way of meeting it. It's his grief, for Phil."

"It's grief for you. He misses you like the deuce. He may not know it, but he does."

"Does he miss me?" she queried, half to herself.

The pink crept into her cheeks. She looked suddenly charming and, the old lady noted, with a pathetic wonder, young. But she wasn't sparing her.

"As for Brooke," she said, "you act as if boys came back every day from — where he's come from. If it hasn't hurt him more than it has, it's because he's in love."

"In love?" cried Isabel. "Brooke in love?"

"Yes, with Andrea Dove. Haven't you seen it?"

"That girl!" cried Isabel, the angry spark flitting into her eyes. "That girl that said — oh, it wasn't true. She might say it till she dropped dead before me, and I should know it wasn't true."

"She isn't going to drop dead before anybody," said the old lady. "She's going to get good and rested now her father's gone — "

"Where has he gone?"

"He's dead," said Madam Brooke. "And we've got to look out for Andrea till she gets on her feet, and then Brooke'll look out for her."

"Never!" said Isabel. She rose from the low chair and stood, making the most of her height. "Never! if she enters this house I shall leave it."

Madam Brooke sat looking at her for a moment, in deep consideration.

"Isabel," said she, "if one of your children committed a sin for your sake — told a lie for instance, to save your life — would you forgive him?"

"No," said Isabel.

But she knew, as Madam Brooke did, that she would. And Madam Brooke was prepared to tell her so.

"Nonsense!" said she. "Of course you would. A sin of love committed for your sake! there's nothing you'd like better. Well, that's what Andrea Dove did. She

lied to make you give her money as Phil's wife when it seemed doubtful whether her father'd live to use it if she got it in any reasonable way. And now he's dead she doesn't want your money or anything that is yours. Except Brooke, of course. I'm in hopes she'll want him or the poor boy'll break his heart."

"I was never," said Isabel breathlessly, "so indignant in my life."

"Yes, you're indignant," said the old lady sadly, "which means you're plain mad. We never knew you had a temper, Isabel, in the old days before we lost you."

Isabel turned, without a look at her, and went out of the room. She walked, her mother thought, like Queen Victoria. Madam Brooke sat bending over her trembling hands thinking sadly of the way these groups of mortal atoms fly apart and make their little catastrophes in the complex order of the movement which is life. But she had not sat there long before she heard her daughter's step again, a quick rush unlike her ordinary high-heeled trot. She came in, up to her mother's knee and sank down there.

"You won't believe it, darling," she cried, between sobbing and excited laughter. "But I've heard from Phil. Miss Bixby left the last message on the table and I've just found it. How he managed it I don't know. But if they can move the pencil in the human hand, why shouldn't they pick it up when they find it lying there all ready? Phil has forgiven her. He tells me to forgive her. And I can do it now. I've heard from him, mother. Don't you realize I've heard from him? And I'll be good, mother. Oh, truly I'll be good."

Madam Brooke laid her hand on the beautiful shining hair. Strange things came into this old lady's mind sometimes, and now she was thinking that women in grief,

in antique days, tore their hair and covered it with ashes; but now the despairing mourner omits no last ceremonial of a symmetrical coiffure. Isabel crouched there like a child and cried like a child, no controlled and ordered rite of weeping but honest gulps and floods. When this abated, she got to her feet, wiped her face and asked quite timidly, in a way that made her, like a child, engaging:

"Shall I go to see her?"

Madam Brooke shook her head.

"Not yet," she answered. "Not these first days. You see, you were rather nasty to her. She's in no condition to be blamed, and it mightn't be easy to convince her you didn't mean to be nasty again."

"I thought," Isabel ventured, "she might come here to us."

"Certainly," said her mother, "most certainly. It's the only way."

"And then," Isabel continued, looking down at the toe of her shoe, as if she were most desirous of not encountering any possible negative in her mother's face, "I thought, as she's been connected with her father's pursuits in that direction, she might be willing to try the automatic writing."

"Isabel!" cried the old lady, so stridently that her daughter started. "Do you mean to tell me you're going on with this jugglery that's turned you into a changeling in your husband's house? And after you told me you'd be good?"

Isabel stood there, still regarding the toe of her shoe.

"Isabel," said Madam Brooke, "come here. Nearer. Yes, come right here to mother. Now, Isabel, I'm going to trust you. Do you hear? And you are going to be — good."

"Yes, mother," said Isabel.

And they talked of other things.

"But will she?" the old lady wondered, when she was again by herself. "Or will she go on muddling her brains and making her lip tremble so I can't look at it without wanting to cry? It's an awful thing to make an old woman cry."

And she laughed, so that Susanne, coming in to mend the fire, smiled at her sympathetically.

"Isn't it, Susanne?" asked the old lady, and Susanne, always blithely willing to accept the immediate point of view, said:

"Yes, Madam Brooke."

"Then," said the old lady, rising, "get a taxi, and if anybody asks you who's going in it — well, when you've called it you might bring me my bonnet and my cloak."

Andrea, sitting at her watch by the dead, heard question and answer in the outer room. In a moment the door opened and the nurse looked in. But before she could announce the visitor or explain that she seemed one not to be denied, Madam Brooke came in, signed the nurse to leave them and put her arms about Andrea, as she sat, and kissed her. Andrea thought she had come to tell her it would be better for her to go out into the air, to go out to spend the night, or do other of those precautionary things that are the sane expedients of watchers less terribly pledged.

"I couldn't," she said, rising and holding the dear old hands and looking into the kind eyes. "I promised him. I've broken a part of it. That may not matter, now he's really gone away. Besides — "

"Besides," said the old lady, "you couldn't bear to. Of course you mustn't leave him. No, my darling! But later — later — "

She smiled, still looking steadfast and kind, and Andrea knew that here was somebody else who had felt the touch of the golden key. And Madam Brooke had called her darling. More than that, she had kissed her, and the word and chrysmal touch were mysteriously not for Andrea's present comforting alone but a deeper solace, declaring, as they did, the knowledge of the wonder, pain and joy of youth and the long way it has to go.

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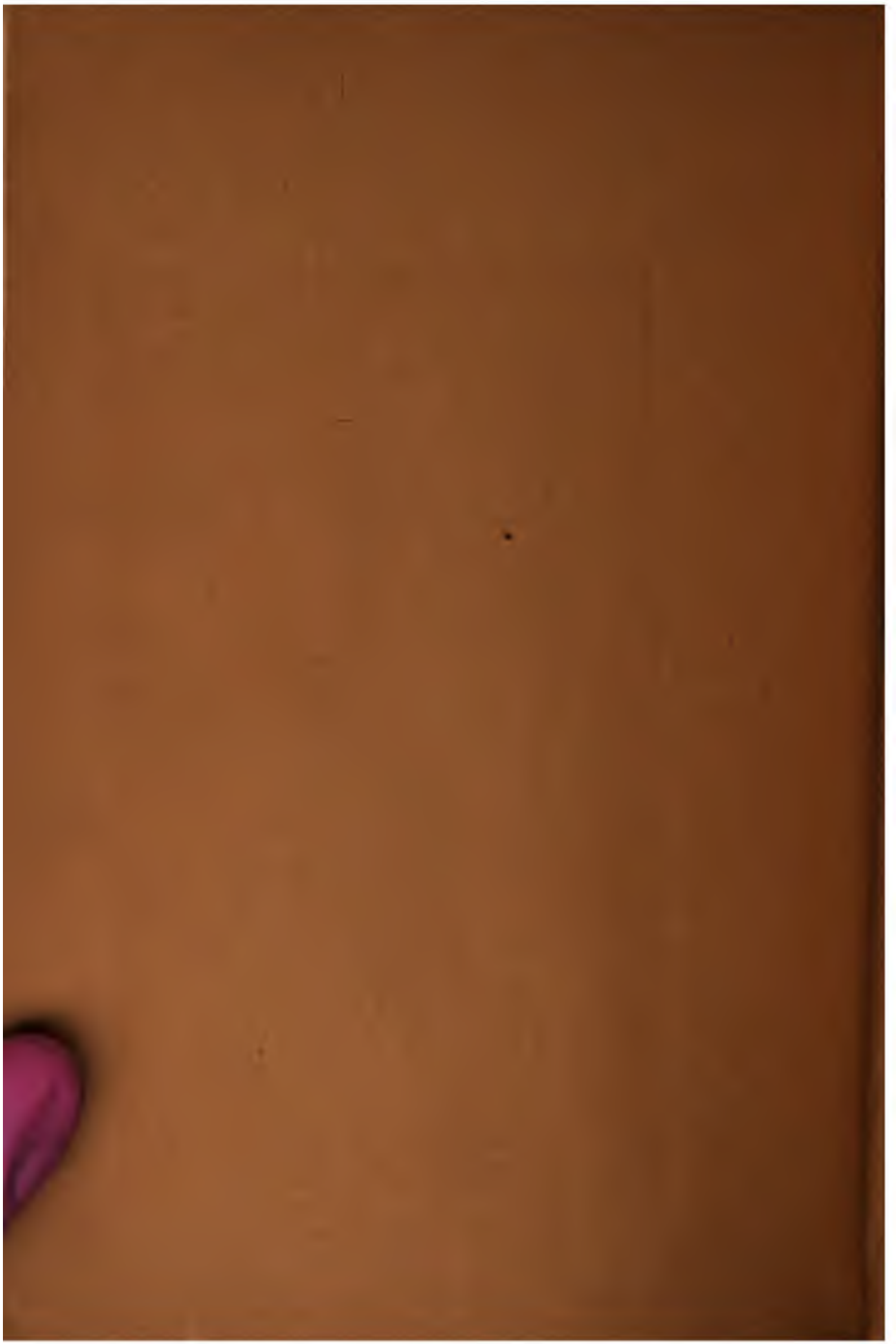

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